

Isolating Refugees in Mountains: The Case of the Austrian Border Regime

Authors : Deike Janssen

Abstract : In the scenery of the Tyrolean mountains, at an altitude of 1300 meters, stands a building. Residents and activists call it a prison. However, it is not a prison -according to authorities, it is a 'Return Counseling Facility' where migrants and refugees should be "motivated" to return "voluntary" to their countries of origin. This paper argues that the geographical location of the camp functions as a site of exclusion, isolation, and coercion where no one can decide "voluntary" to return, but where people are brought to despair to leave Austria. Through a qualitative case study, this paper documents the heavy impact of offshore detention on the mental, physical and social state of the residents and a variety of human rights problems in the centre. Different developments at the Return Counselling Facility and the law that back up the centre uncover a worrying dynamic that deliberately accepts human rights problems in order to enforce borders, a policy that disregards humanitarian, legal, and ethical stands in order to deport people at all hazards. It, therefore, can be seen as a creative and ultimate exercise of state power, which uses isolated locations to control migration. While the analysis revises the micro and macro implications of the facility and, therefore, the legal and political facets, it also sheds light on the role of the civil society, which tries to increase through constant and collective efforts the human rights efforts of the government.

Keywords : deportation, human rights, migration, refugee detention, voluntary return

Conference Title : ICMRS 2022 : International Conference on Migration and Refugee Studies

Conference Location : London, United Kingdom

Conference Dates : November 18-19, 2022