

Reception of asylum seekers in Greece: the demand for humane conditions remains

Athens, 9th of November 2023: The undersigned organizations are sounding the alarm on the ongoing malfunctioning of the country's reception system that deprives asylum seekers and refugees of access to rights and services, in violation of EU and national legislation.

On the islands, the reception facilities (CCACs) remain in a state of overcrowding, mostly in Kos, where the new arrivals are subject to an informal detention regime until their registration, without access to a doctor following the departure of the medical staff at the end of October. The situation is similar in Samos, where a military doctor has occasionally provided to meet the needs of almost 4,000 residents.

The situation is even more precarious at the sea entry points that are not equipped with a CCAC. At these entry points, despite the steady flow of arrivals, there is no provision from the competent authorities of the State to cover even the most basic reception conditions. As a result, access for new arrivals to fundamental rights such as housing, food and health care, an obligation and responsibility of the central administration, is left to the discretion of local authorities and civil society. The island of Rhodes, which completely lacks in infrastructure and reception services and where almost 5, 000 people have arrived since the beginning of the year, is an illustrative example of the above. Violations of the human rights of new arrivals are also recorded on the island of Lesbos, where people are reportedly detained for more than a month upon arrival. In some cases, they are even denied their access to health care and food while in detention.

In the mainland, the accommodation facilities have also overcome their full capacity, resulting in even extremely vulnerable asylum seekers (e.g. victims of torture, human trafficking, single-parent families, etc.) not having access to reception conditions. Concerning children, it is doubtful whether and to what extent child protection services are functioning. Asylum seekers with special medical needs, such as diabetics and cardiac patients, do not have access to adequate treatment and nutrition and/or are not identified in time, mothers cannot provide milk for their children, and families are looking for self-housing solutions.

We note that:

- The current situation of the reception system, impacting the possibility of accessing other rights, such as asylum, cannot be repeated every time the number of arrivals increases. The Greek State, with the assistance of the EU, must immediately ensure that the needs of all those seeking protection are met and that the long-term sustainability of the reception system is guaranteed, including through adequate staffing of the structures with the necessary personnel, in particular permanent medical and psychosocial staff.
- There is an urgent need to review the policy option to end alternative forms of reception, such as those that were provided under the ESTIA programme, which today could have made a decisive contribution both to the decongestion of the reception system and to the respect of the dignity of persons seeking international protection in Greece.

- The unilateralism in the management of the refugee-migration issue, which is almost exclusively linked in public political discourse to the prevention of arrivals, exposing the country internationally with the denounced practices of refoulement, constitutes a failure to manage a complex issue, which Greece and the EU must manage with full respect for International Human Rights Law and the constitutional principles of the European Union. To this end, especially in the context of the negotiations on the European Pact on Migration and Asylum, active and strong initiatives are needed to ensure a fair distribution of responsibilities among the EU Member States, which seem to continue to seek to shift responsibility to the states at Europe's borders, but also to third countries, such as Libya, Turkiye, Tunisia, and now Albania following the signature of the bilateral agreement with Italy, which are characterized by at least a controversial record in terms of respect for the human rights of both refugees and their citizens.

The undersigned organizations:

Arsis Association for the Social Support of Youth

Avocats sans Frontières France

Better Days Greece

Changemakers Lab

Defence for Children International Greece (DCI Greece)

Diotima Centre for Gender Rights and Equality

Dråpen i havet/ Stagona

Equal Legal Aid

Equal Rights Beyond Borders

Fenix Humanitarian Legal Aid

Greek Council for Refugees

Greek Forum of Migrants

Habibi.Works (Soup and Socks, e.V.)

HIAS Greece

I Have Rights

Jesuit Refugee Service Greece (JRS)

Legal Centre Lesbos

Lesvos Solidarity

Lighthouse Relief

Mobile Info Team

Project Armonia

Refugee Legal Support (RLS)

Samos Volunteers

Symbiosis-Council of Europe School of Political Studies in Greece

Thalassa of Solidarity

Yoga and Sport with Refugees