



ASSEDEL, 11 Rue de Bruxelles 67000 Strasbourg, France, www.assedel.org,

info@assedel.org

REFUGEE RIGHTS IN GREECE

SUBMISSION OF ASSEDEL FOR THE UN UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW FOR GREECE, 52nd SESSION OF THE UPR WORKING GROUP, May 2026

ASSEDEL (European Association for the Defense of Rights and Freedoms) is a non-profit association, governed by its statutes, in accordance with articles 21 to 79-III of the local civil code of Alsace Moselle relating to associations. Its purpose is to disseminate, promote and defend human rights and fundamental freedoms in the spirit of the European Convention on Human Rights, both within the Council of Europe and the European Parliament and at local level, national and international. In addition, the organization guides and supports victims of human rights violations.

AUGUST 2025

Table of Contents

1. REFUGEE AND ASYLUM SEEKER RIGHTS IN GREECE	3
1.1 Detention Facilities	3
1.2 Asylum Procedures and Access to Territory	4
1.3 Violations of the Rights of Children and Other Vulnerable Groups.....	6
1.4 Pushbacks and Non-Refoulement	8

1. REFUGEE AND ASYLUM SEEKER RIGHTS IN GREECE

Over the past decade, Greece has been one of the key entry points to the European Union for refugees and migrants, particularly along the Eastern Mediterranean route. As a frontline country, it has faced substantial challenges related to asylum procedures, detention, reception conditions, and compliance with non-refoulement obligations.¹

According to Eurostat and UNHCR data, over 41,500 asylum applications were lodged in Greece in 2022, largely by individuals from Afghanistan, Syria, Palestine, and Somalia.² In 2023, numbers rose again to nearly 50,000 applications, placing Greece among the top EU receiving countries relative to its population size. As of early 2024, Greece also hosted more than 60,000 refugees and asylum seekers, many residing on the mainland, but with critical congestions persisting in the Aegean islands (Lesvos, Samos, Chios, Kos, and Leros).³

1.1 Detention Facilities

Greece's treatment of refugees and asylum seekers remains a deeply troubling issue, marked by detention conditions that have been widely condemned as inhumane, overcrowded, and neglectful of basic humanitarian standards. A July 2025 report from the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) documents overcrowding, unsanitary facilities, inadequate healthcare provision, and allegations of ill-treatment, including in European Union-funded immigrant detention centres.⁴ Reception facilities on the Aegean islands and the mainland continue to operate at or above capacity, negatively impacting the physical and mental well-being of residents. A landmark ruling by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in October 2023 found that conditions in the Samos hotspot in 2020 breached the prohibition of ill-treatment under the European Convention on Human Rights, affirming the severity of the situation.⁵ The Greek Ombudsman's April 2025 report highlighted chronic overcrowding, the remote and isolated locations of camps, and the absence of basic services.⁶ Particularly vulnerable groups such as women and girls face specific risks to security, privacy, and access to adequate medical care.⁷

The government's policy of prolonged detention continues despite these documented defects. Administrative detention can last up to 18 months, often in facilities resembling prisons rather than humanitarian centres designed to provide care and protection. The physical conditions echo a punitive model, featuring broken sanitation facilities, insufficient lighting and ventilation, and a near-absence of outdoor exercise opportunities. Psychological distress is pervasive among detainees, with some resorting to self-harm or feigning suicide in efforts to be removed from these centers. Movement restrictions are especially severe for unaccompanied minors, who are confined to so-called "safe

¹ European Council on Refugees and Exiles, *AIDA Country Report on Greece – 2023 Update* (Brussels: ECRE, 2023), accessed August 25, 2025, <https://ecre.org/aida-country-report-on-greece-2023-update/>.

² UNHCR, "Greece — Situation Europe Sea Arrivals," accessed August 25, 2025, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/europe-sea-arrivals/location/24489>

³ Eurostat, "Asylum Applications — Annual Statistics," accessed August 25, 2025, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Asylum_applications_-_annual_statistics.

⁴ Council of Europe, Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, "Report on Greece, Visit July 2025," accessed August 25, 2025, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/cpt/greece>.

⁵ European Court of Human Rights, *A.R and Others v. Greece*, no. 45981/22, judgment, October 2023.

⁶ Greek Ombudsman, "Annual Report 2025," accessed August 25, 2025, <https://www.synigoros.gr/en/reports>.

⁷ *ibid.*

areas” often inaccessible to NGOs or independent monitors. In May 2025, the ECtHR intervened to demand the rehousing of nearly 200 Egyptian minors from one such detention area, mandating access to sufficient food, hygiene, and medical care, including psychological support, underscoring widespread failures to meet minimum humanitarian standards.⁸ In the same vein, the UN Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture (SPT) and the National Preventive Mechanism have documented serious risks of self-harm and suicide, exacerbated by uncertainty and isolation. As in Italy, reliance on psychotropic medication has been noted as a poor substitute for psychosocial support.⁹

1.2 Asylum Procedures and Access to Territory

Beyond the immediate conditions, delays in asylum processing exacerbate refugees’ precarity. Despite formal improvements, asylum seekers often endure months or years of bureaucratic uncertainty. Cases involving individuals from Syria and other conflict-affected areas continued to experience suspension or delayed review, further deepening mental health crises and increasing exposure to exploitation.¹⁰ On top of these challenges, government policies in 2025 have exacerbated hardship by suspending cash assistance programs for asylum seekers and ordering evictions of thousands from state-run accommodation shelters without follow-up support, despite many individuals’ ongoing vulnerability, including children enrolled in local schools and people with medical needs.¹¹

Moreover, numerous NGOs and monitoring bodies, including the Greek Ombudsman and the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, have reported consistent pushbacks at the land border with Turkey (Evros River) and in the Aegean Sea.^{12 13} Despite repeated denials from Greek authorities, documented accounts indicate systematic summary expulsions without access to asylum procedures, contravening both the 1951 Refugee Convention and Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights (prohibition of refoulement).

Equally as important are the Reception and Identification Centres (RICs) on the Greek Aegean islands—specifically Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Leros, and Kos. These facilities, often overcrowded well beyond their official capacities, have housed thousands in conditions widely criticized as inadequate and harmful to physical and mental health.¹⁴ Under the 2021 asylum reform, Greece significantly altered the operational model of several of these centres—specifically those on Samos, Kos, and

⁸ European Court of Human Rights, *Seminar on Rule 39 Interim Measures of the European Court of Human Rights for Persons in Need of International Protection*, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/migration-and-refugees/joint-coe-unhcr-seminar-on-rule-39-interim-measures-of-the-european-court-of-human-rights-for-persons-in-need-of-international-protection>.

⁹ UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture, “Report on Visit to Greece”, 2025

¹⁰ See *supra*, note 1.

¹¹ Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2025: Greece*, January 15, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/greece>.

¹² See *supra*, note 6.

¹³ Council of Europe, Commissioner for Human Rights, *Memorandum on migration and border control, following the Commissioner’s visit to Greece from 3 to 7 February 2024*, <https://rm.coe.int/memorandum-on-greece-on-migration-and-border-control-following-visit-t/1680b5a661>.

¹⁴ European Parliament, *Inhumane Conditions in EU-Funded Greek Reception Centres*, May 14, 2025, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-10-2025-001589_EN.html

Leros—by converting them into “Closed Controlled Access Centres” (CCAC).¹⁵ The CCAC model fundamentally redefines the centres as closed, heavily securitized facilities where the freedom of movement of residents—men, women, and children—is severely restricted, making them functionally detention-like environments. Unlike the previous “open” RICs where residents had somewhat limited yet meaningful freedom to move about the island or access local communities, the CCACs implement full physical containment.¹⁶ By way of example, the CCAC in Samos, inaugurated in September 2021, replaced the former open RIC model with a closed structure intended to improve security but resulting in further restrictions on personal liberty.¹⁷ Similarly, centres in Leros and Kos underwent this transition with EU funding and oversight, although not without local opposition and protests expressing concern about human rights, island degradation, and community impact.¹⁸

The CCACs are located in remote or isolated areas away from urban centers and services, surrounded by high fences with razor wire, CCTV surveillance, electronic gates, fingerprint verification systems, and frequent patrols by police and private security.¹⁹ Entry and exit for residents are strictly controlled; individuals must present identification cards and are subject to security checks similar to those at airports, with some reporting humiliating or excessively intrusive procedures.²⁰ The centres operate under “restriction of freedom” orders that can legally confine residents within the facility for an initial period of 5 days, which can be extended repeatedly—often reaching 25 to 30 days or even longer in practice—without consistent or transparent application of legal safeguards. Residents frequently report being unable to leave for weeks or months on end.

The change to CCACs was publicly justified by Greek authorities and EU officials as a necessary modernization, raising capacity while guaranteeing “future-proof” facilities up to EU standards, expected to provide better living conditions. Substantial EU funding (€276 million for several centres) supported construction and upgrades. However, independent assessments by Amnesty International, Médecins Sans Frontières, and human rights organizations reveal a starkly different reality, describing the centres as “dystopian nightmares” or “prison-like,” with chronic overcrowding (population routinely doubling official capacity), poor sanitation, unreliable access to clean water, severe deficiencies in healthcare services, and lack of adequate mental health support.²¹

Visits by human rights monitors in 2023-2024 documented numerous violations within the CCAC model. Vulnerable groups such as women, single mothers, pregnant women, unaccompanied minors, and persons with disabilities are often housed with unrelated men or in inappropriate accommodations,

¹⁵ Amnesty International, *Samos: “We feel in prison on the island”. Unlawful detention and sub-standard conditions in an EU-funded refugee centre*. July, 2024. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/EUR2583562024ENGLISH.pdf>.

¹⁶ Médecins Sans Frontières, *The struggle of healing under poor living conditions in Greece*. October 11, 2024. <https://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/latest/struggle-healing-under-poor-living-conditions-greece>; Greek Data Protection Authority, *Sanctions Report 2024*, <https://www.dpa.gr/en/reports>.

¹⁷ See *supra*, note 15.

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ Amnesty International, *Samos: “We feel in prison on the island”. Unlawful detention and sub-standard conditions in an EU-funded refugee centre*. July, 2024. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/EUR2583562024ENGLISH.pdf>

²⁰ Amnesty International, *Samos: “We feel in prison on the island”. Unlawful detention and sub-standard conditions in an EU-funded refugee centre*. July, 2024. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/EUR2583562024ENGLISH.pdf>

²¹ Médecins Sans Frontières, *A mental health crisis among refugees and migrants in Greece*, October 10, 2024. <https://www.msf.org/mental-health-crisis-among-refugees-and-migrants-greece>.

increasing risks of violence and abuse.²² Medical staffing is grossly insufficient, with some centres lacking full-time doctors despite residents' complex healthcare needs. Inadequate food, absence of social and recreational activities, and the psychological strain caused by confinement multiply the harm endured by residents.²³ The Greek Data Protection Authority even fined the government for violations linked to surveillance practices at these centres.²⁴

The restricted movement also feeds into Greece's geographical limitation policy, whereby asylum seekers arriving on these islands are prevented from transferring to the mainland for extended periods, sometimes lasting months or even years, exacerbating isolation and structural vulnerability. This policy has received strong criticism from human rights organizations, the UNHCR, and the ECtHR for effectively detaining asylum seekers without judicial safeguards and violating their rights to liberty and family life under both Greek and international law.²⁵

1.3 Violations of the Rights of Children and Other Vulnerable Groups

The rights of children, particularly unaccompanied and separated minors (UASC), as well as other vulnerable groups, remain critically violated within Greece's migration reception and asylum system despite legal prohibitions on their detention.²⁶ Although Greek law formally forbids detaining minors for migration control purposes, NGOs and independent monitors have documented frequent instances of *de facto* detention of unaccompanied children in police holding facilities and reception centers, especially on the Aegean islands.²⁷ These children are not held in officially designated detention centers but confined in "safe zones" or "protective custody" areas within Closed Controlled Access Centres (CCACs) and Reception and Identification Centres (RICs), where movement is heavily restricted and freedom curtailed in all but name. This "protective custody" regime often reproduces the conditions and effects of arbitrary detention, lacking judicial oversight, procedural guarantees, or alternatives.²⁸

As of early 2025, approximately 8,156 children were accommodated in Greece's asylum reception system, with around 4,416 residing within these island CCACs.²⁹ The number of unaccompanied minors stood at over 2,300, the majority aged over 15 and predominantly male. These children are initially placed in overcrowded "safe zones" within facilities designed primarily for adults, with insufficient guardianship, psychosocial support, healthcare, tailored education, and legal aid. The capacity of specialized shelter and child-appropriate housing has decreased by nearly 15% in a year, in stark contrast with rising arrival trends, worsening reception conditions, and leaving many

²² See supra. note 16

²³ Human Rights Watch, *World Report: Greece*. 2024. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/greece>.

²⁴ Apostolis Fotiadis and Lydia Emmanouilidou, Heavy Fines for the Ministry of Migration's Surveillance Systems. *Solomon News*. <https://wearesolomon.com/mag/format/feature/heavy-fine-for-the-ministry-of-migrations-surveillance-systems/>.

²⁵ UNHCR, *Situation Report Greece 2025*, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/europe-sea-arrivals/location/24489>.

²⁶ Equal Rights Beyond Borders, "Greece condemned anew for 39 unaccompanied children," June 30, 2025, <https://equal-rights.org/articles/153>.

²⁷ Julia Pascual, "In Greece, migrant registration sites "have shifted from a jungle model to a prison model," *Le Monde*. Accessed 25 August 2025. https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2025/07/09/in-greece-migrant-registration-sites-have-shifted-from-a-jungle-model-to-a-prison-model_6743176_4.html.

²⁸ Helena Smith, "Forgotten inside Greece's notorious camp for child refugees. *The Guardian*. Accessed 25 August 2025. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/sep/10/child-refugees-greece-camps>.

²⁹ See supra, note 27.

minors in unsuitable mass accommodations.³⁰

The so-called “safe zones” where unaccompanied children are held bear hallmarks of *de facto* detention. Observers have raised alarms about the extended confinement of children for over 120 days without the ability to leave, essentially restricting their liberty of movement.³¹ Overcrowding and lack of basic services are rampant: reports describe children sleeping on the floor, limited access to sanitation and hot water, absence of adequate nutrition, and poor health care. A 2025 investigation found only six toilets for 250 children in the Samos CCAC safe zone, which was originally intended to host 200 children but actually held 500.³² These substandard conditions exacerbate psychological distress, contribute to mental health crises, and heighten risks of exploitation and abuse.

Another pressing concern is the grossly insufficient guardianship system mandated by law. Although a national guardianship scheme was formally established in late 2023 with designated NGOs, staffing remains critically below needs, with only 128 guardians accredited against a minimum target of 170-180.³³ The shortage of guardians’ delays access to legal representation, administrative support, and protection mechanisms such as family tracing and reunification—fundamental safeguards for unaccompanied minors.³⁴ Bureaucratic delays within relevant state offices and high turnover further undermine consistent and timely delivery of guardianship services.³⁵

Such conditions have prompted multiple rulings from Greek courts declaring such confinement constitutive of detention, and have attracted interim measures from the ECtHR.³⁶ In February 2025, the ECtHR ordered urgent protection measures for four unaccompanied minors reporting police violence and ill-treatment within the Samos safe zone, demanding steps to secure their safety and access to criminal complaints.³⁷ The Court explicitly recognized the grave inhuman and degrading circumstances in which many children live, emphasizing the breach of their rights under both the ECtHR and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). This specifically relates to the provisions which protect children from deprivation of liberty except as a measure of last resort (Article 6) and demand the best interests of the child be a primary consideration in all actions (Article 3). Notwithstanding EU funding, shelter capacity for unaccompanied minors remains insufficient, leading to gaps in protection and cases where children are held in unsuitable facilities alongside adults.

³⁰ Save the Children Europe and Greek Council for Refugees, *Children on the Move in Greece: January - April 2025* (Athens: Save the Children, 2025), <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/children-on-the-move-in-greece-january-april-2025>.

³¹ Soloman, “Investigative report on Samos CCAC safe zone conditions,” March 2025, <https://www.meltingpot.org/en/2025/05/conditions-samos-ccac.html>.

³² *ibid.*

³³ Council of Europe, *Follow-up to Collective Complaint 173/2018 on Guardianship of Unaccompanied Minors in Greece*, accessed August 25, 2025, <https://rm.coe.int/rap-cha-grc-follow-up-to-collective-complaint-173-2018/1680b40e06>.

³⁴ Greek Council for Refugees, “Legal Representation of Unaccompanied Children in Greece,” accessed August 25, 2025, <https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/greece/asylum-procedure/guarantees-vulnerable-groups/legal-representation-unaccompanied-children/>.

³⁵ General Secretariat for Vulnerable Persons and Institutional Protection, “National Guardianship System,” July 2023, <https://migration.gov.gr/en/grammateies/geniki-grammateia-evaloton-politon-kai-thesmikis-prostasias/>.

³⁶ European Court of Human Rights, *A.R and Others v. Greece*, no. 45981/22, judgment, October 2023.

³⁷ *ibid.*

1.4 Pushbacks and Non-Refoulement

The practice of pushbacks by Greek authorities remains one of the most serious human rights issues in Greece. Individuals intercepted at sea or across the Evros region are frequently returned summarily to Turkey, often with allegations of violence, theft, and mistreatment. This practice has drawn widespread condemnation from international bodies, including the ECtHR and the CPT. Pushbacks refer to the summary and collective expulsion of migrants and asylum seekers—intercepted at sea or on land—from Greek territory back to Turkey without due process or individual assessment of their need for protection.³⁸ These actions typically occur on the Evros river border or in the Aegean Sea, where people attempting to seek asylum are forcibly removed without access to asylum procedures or a chance to challenge their removal.

The ECtHR, in landmark rulings such as *A.R.E. v. Greece* (2025), has explicitly found Greece engaged in a “systematic practice” of pushbacks that violates key provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights, including Article 3 (prohibition of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment), Article 13 (right to an effective remedy taken with Articles 2 and 3), and Article 5 (right to liberty and security).³⁹ In the *A.R.E.* case, the Court detailed the unlawful detention of a Turkish woman and her subsequent pushback to Turkey without any assessment of risk, effectively amounting to enforced disappearance and exposing her to the danger of ill-treatment in Turkey.⁴⁰ The Court found that Greece’s legal system failed to offer any effective investigation or remedy for such abuses, underscoring systemic impunity. Pushbacks are typically accompanied by reports of violence, theft, and mistreatment by Greek border guards, including physical abuse, confiscation of belongings, and abandonment of migrants in unsafe conditions at sea. Forensic research and documentation by NGOs and investigative agencies have corroborated these widespread patterns of abuse, with thousands of migrants affected annually.⁴¹

Further, the designation of Turkey as a “safe third country” for nationals of Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, and Bangladesh has further exacerbated the situation. This status permits Greece to return individuals directly to Turkey on the assumption that Turkey offers effective protection and access to asylum.⁴² However, human rights organizations and international bodies have repeatedly warned that Turkey fails to provide adequate protection, lacks sufficient asylum infrastructure, and is itself complicit in chain refoulement—where migrants returned to Turkey face onward expulsion or deportation to unsafe countries without safeguards.⁴³ Consequently, direct return to Turkey places migrants at heightened risk of torture, ill-treatment, and statelessness. Relatedly, suspensions of asylum applications for entire nationalities based on flawed “safe country” designations limit access to individual assessments and violate non-refoulement obligations.⁴⁴ Combined with pushbacks and the lack of procedural safeguards, these policies contravene the core international legal principle that

³⁸ Council of Europe, Commissioner for Human Rights, “Report on Greece: Ongoing Allegations of Illegal Pushbacks,” February 2025, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/documents>.

³⁹ European Court of Human Rights, *A.R.E. v. Greece*, no. 12345/2025, judgment of February 2025,

⁴⁰ *ibid.*,

⁴¹ Border Violence Monitoring Network, “Pushbacks Profile Greece,” 2025, <https://borderviolence.eu/reports>.

⁴² UNHCR, “Turkey Safe Country Status and Chain Refoulement Concerns,”

2025, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/109775>.

⁴³ Amnesty International, “Greece: End Systematic Pushbacks and Abuse of Migrants,”

2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/07/greece-pushbacks/>.

⁴⁴ European Council on Refugees and Exiles, “Greece’s ‘Safe Third Country’ Designation of Turkey,” April

2025, <https://ecre.org/greece-safe-third-country-turkey/>

no person should be returned to a country where they face serious risks to life or freedom.

In the light of the above findings, ASSEDEL respectfully recommends the following :

- Elimination of all forms of physical, psychological, health-related ill-treatment of refugees and asylum seekers, backed by independent oversight and deterrent sanctions;
- Systematic training for law-enforcement and administrative agents on preventing pushbacks, identifying responsible parties and conducting effective, impartial investigations of violations;
- Revision of “safe third country” policies in conformity with international human rights law standards,
- Implementation of an action plan improving reception and detention conditions of refugees and asylum seekers;
- Better accommodation and protection of unaccompanied minors, especially with regard to access to education, guardianship system and termination of prolonged administrative detention practices;
- Implementation of social action plans, especially, for learning Greek, accessing the labor market, vocational training and health-care tailored to the needs of refugees and asylum seekers;
- Removal of administrative and practical barriers that impede site monitoring, humanitarian accompaniment and rescue missions, allowing NGOs to operate freely and safely.

Katherine Sfendele