

## **Greece may need to register up to 44,000 asylum seekers in centres which currently have capacity for just 282 people.**

20 January 2022 – On 22 November 2021 the Ministry of Migration and Asylum overhauled access to asylum on mainland Greece, scrapping the remote Skype system which was previously used for the registration of asylum applications and implementing a new system which foresees the use of two reception centres which do not yet exist.

This change dictates that people who enter Greece via land borders - which is now the majority of asylum seekers - will need to register their asylum claims in Reception and Identification Centres where they will be detained in prison-like conditions.

Greece may see up to 44,000 people seeking asylum on the mainland annually, but the only Reception and Identification Centre currently operational on the mainland has capacity for just 282 people and is located in the Evros region, near the border with Turkey. The centre is currently people's only hope for accessing their right to seek asylum, but is often overcrowded and denounced for its inability to deliver essential services such as healthcare.

*“We are appalled that access to asylum on mainland Greece has yet again been blocked and concerned that this policy is less about fair and efficient access to asylum and more about the control and containment of people in need of protection.*

*The victims of this policy change include a destitute family of four with two children under the age of three who are forced to sleep on the streets of Athens despite the wife being pregnant and needing medical assistance; a young man sleeping on the streets of Thessaloniki who is unable to get surgery for his broken leg; and a family of four who are severely traumatised from the father's torture in Afghanistan and their treacherous journey to seek safety in Europe”,* said Corinne Linnecar, Advocacy Manager at Greece-based charity Mobile Info Team.

Since the implementation of the policy on 22 November 2021, Mobile Info Team has been contacted by numerous individuals and families who wish to claim asylum in Greece.

- Between 30,160 and 44,000 people may need to register asylum claims annually on mainland Greece

- Since 22nd November those who connect with the Greek Asylum service on the previously used Skype system have been told that the route to asylum has changed and to wait for an announcement from the Ministry
- The majority of people on mainland Greece have had no meaningful way to access the asylum system since 22nd November 2021

Two additional Reception and Identification centres on the Greek mainland have been promised but there has been no announcement on where or when such centres will be operational. The new centres would each need capacity for an estimated 1,833 people making them six times larger than the current mainland facility. These centres would need to be around the same size as the centre on Kos which is situated on a site measuring 90 acres - equal to the size of 60 football pitches. But the NGO argues the proposed use of closed reception centres is unnecessary, unjust and unviable.

*“Policies of control and containment impede people’s ability to rebuild their lives, negatively impact people’s mental health and take away people’s autonomy and liberty.*

*They also do no favors for Greece as those locked into these centres are forced to rely on the state for extended periods and are unable to contribute to their new communities.*

*With more people now arriving in Greece via land routes, it has never been more essential to have fair and efficient access to the asylum procedure on the mainland. Greek people are tired of seeing mass detention facilities for people seeking asylum, and the construction or repurposing of two additional huge, costly, prison-like sites is the last thing anyone could wish for.”*, said Corinne Linnecar.

People in need of safety should again be able to register asylum claims in Regional Asylum Office’s and Unit’s across the country, as was possible before 22nd November 2021.

Without any other viable interim measures available, the majority of people on mainland Greece will continue to have no access to asylum and be forced to remain undocumented, destitute and at risk in Europe.

-- End press release --

**Notes**

- Mobile Info Team is a Greece-based organisation that provides advice and assistance to people seeking asylum and refugees throughout Greece
- On 22nd November a Circular was issued announcing major changes to the asylum procedure and implementing, two days later after complaints by MPs and local residents, the Circular was reissued. See the final Circular and Clarification here: <https://migration.gov.gr/en/diakasias-y-povolis-aitimatou-asyloy/>
- Marios Kaleas, Commander of the Greek Asylum Service reported that there will be two Reception Centres on mainland Greece during an interview with the Guardian, see 'Refugees forced to claim asylum in 'jail-like' camps as Greece tightens system' on theguardian.com, available at: <https://bit.ly/3thMVYg>
- It is not the first time that the Greek government has blocked people from entering the asylum system. On 2 March 2020, an emergency legislative decree[1] was adopted that temporarily blocked access to the asylum procedure for people who entered Greece 'illegally' from 1 March 2020. This measure, as part of a response to disagreements with Turkey, was in place for one month. Yet, the asylum procedure did not reopen until 15 May 2020 with the stated justification being Covid-19.

## Statistics

- **We estimate that between 30,160 and 44,000 people may need to register annually on mainland Greece. Statistics dictating the size of Reception and Identification Centres were calculated using the lower estimate.**
- Our upper estimate uses data from UNHCR on yearly arrivals to Greece over a five year period from 2016 to 2020. We calculated a yearly average of arrivals by totalling the number of arrivals for this period (354,361) and then subtracted 3% (10,631) to account for subsequent applications giving a yearly average of 68,746 first instance applications. We then assumed that the percentage of arrivals would continue to increase in line with the upwards trajectory from the past five years. Seeing as there were 39% more land arrivals from the years 2020 to 2021 we assume that the percentage of land arrivals will increase again by just half of this from 53% to 64%. This gives us the figure 43,997, which we rounded to the nearest 10. **44,000 people seeking asylum may need to register on the mainland annually.**  
<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean/location/5179>

- Our lower estimate was achieved by using data from Asylum in Europe Database country reports which is based on official Ministry of Migration and Asylum. We calculated a yearly average of asylum applications by totalling the number of asylum applications over a five year period from 2016 to 2020 (284,557) minus the number of subsequent applications for this period (10,010 which is 3%) giving a yearly average of 56,911 first instance asylum applications. We then assumed that Greece will continue to see 53% of new arrivals via the mainland. This gives us the figure of 30,163, which we rounded to the nearest 10. **30, 160 people seeking asylum may need to register on the mainland annually.** <https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/greece/>

## Contact

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