GREECE

BIMONTHLY BULLETIN ON REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS

OCTOBER 2022
AT A GLANCE

- Between 15 March and 27 September 2022, the European Court of Human Rights granted 20 interim measures in a series of cases of refugees and migrants in the Evros region, represented by GCR, ordering the Greek authorities for their immediate rescue. Despite the court rulings, most of the people were pushed back or forcibly expelled to Turkey. Those who were formally arrested and registered report that they had previously experienced pushbacks.

- In August, 38 refugees were stranded on an islet in the Evros river for days. No rescue operation was launched by the Greek authorities, who claimed that the refugees were located on Turkish territory. The refugees were formally arrested and registered only after they reported that a five-year-old girl died on the islet.

- Since 10 August, around 50 people are said to be missing after a migrant boat leaving from southern Turkey and heading to Italy sank in the Aegean Sea, off the Greek island of Rhodes.

- An increasing number of migrants on boats sailing from Turkey and Lebanon to Italy disembark on southern Greek islands or coastal areas after several days adrift at sea. Dramatic delays in EU states’ Search and Rescue (SAR) operations demonstrate their disregard of international obligations to rescue victims in the Mediterranean Sea. A 4-year-old Syrian girl died from dehydration, an 8-month pregnant woman lost her child, many were injured and two people went missing after a delayed and inadequate SAR operation in the Maltese SAR zone, off Crete.

- An unjustified 25-day movement restriction has been applied to newly arrived asylum seekers in Samos Closed Controlled Access Center.

- Construction of a new EU funded closed refugee centre, isolated in a forest area on Lesvos, will proceed despite serious concerns over security and forest fires, residents’ effective access to rights and services, and a lack of procedural safeguards in the border procedure.

- Registration of asylum applications resumed via online pre-registration platforms after months of being dysfunctional. No special provisions have been made for those with vulnerabilities.

- The Greek Government violently closed Elaionas camp with the involvement of riot police. Newly arrived Yezidi refugees remained homeless and without access to drinking water outside of Serres Camp for days.

- Refugee children having to leave their accommodation leads to disruption of school attendance as the new school year starts, while further obstructions of school enrolment, attendance and transportation remain unresolved.
1. Pushbacks in Evros on Greece-Turkey border

Between mid-March 2022 and 27 September 2022, GCR successfully filed interim measures before the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) for 20 groups of refugees and migrants that arrived in the Evros region. Despite the Court’s orders, most of these people were pushed back to Turkey.¹

In addition to the interim measures, since the beginning of the year, GCR alone has sent more than 100 interventions to the Greek authorities requesting the search and rescue of more than 700 refugees from Syria, Turkey, Iraq and Afghanistan, including children and people with severe vulnerabilities. However, the Greek authorities responded positively in only roughly half of these cases, while in other cases they either did not reply or stated that they failed to locate the refugees. In numerous cases, the refugees later contacted GCR and stated that they had been forcibly returned to Turkey.²

Simultaneously, the Government invested in further fortification of the Evros border region by extending the border fence, recruiting additional border guards, and acquiring more vehicles for the border police.³ Senior political figures and government ministers continue their campaign of fearmongering and xenophobic communication around migration, announcing that access to Greek territory will be denied to new arrivals from Turkey.⁴

Dispute and Controversy over the Case of 38 Syrian and Palestinian Refugees in Evros

In July 2022, a group of 50 refugees from Syria entered Greece and were stranded on an islet in the Evros river. On 20 July the ECtHR granted interim measures for their immediate rescue. According to accounts of the refugees involved, a few days later they were transferred from the islet to the mainland, where they were informally detained in an unknown location and subsequently forcibly expelled to Turkey. Part of the group, joined by others, managed to re-enter Greece on 7 August 2022 and were again trapped on another islet. The organizations that represented them before the ECtHR and several media outlets called on the Greek authorities to urgently proceed to their rescue.⁵ The authorities responded at first that the group could not be located and later that the part of the islet where the group was stranded is Turkish territory, disregarding their legal obligation to rescue people seeking asylum at the border.

¹ More detailed information on the 19 cases that GCR has either solely or jointly with other Organizations represented before the ECtHR can be found here: GCR, Information Note, updated on 1st September 2022, https://bit.ly/3fmraBB. Interim measures were granted for one more case on 22 September 2022, 44833/22 S.G. and others v. Greece.
² As above
⁵ Peoples’ Dispatch, Syrian child reported dead as asylum seekers left stranded in Greece-Turkey border area, 12 August 2022, https://bit.ly/3y2YXX4
Media reports that a five-year old girl died while waiting for the rescue operation after being bitten by a scorpion and buried on the islet, caused considerable public concern. The Greek authorities proceeded to arrest the group and transferred them to a reception and registration facility on the mainland, after the people left the islet on their own initiative and moved to the mainland by themselves. The Government merely questioned whether there was indeed a dead girl on the islet and whether the part of the islet where the refugees were stranded was Greek or Turkish territory, instead of taking accountability for this systematic policy of lacking or severely delayed rescues, in this case resulting in the death of a child.

2. Migrant boats sailing from Lebanon and Turkey to Italy arrive off Southern Greek islands

According to UNHCR, in the first seven months of 2022, 11,302 people arrived on Italian shores directly from Turkey and 1,533 directly from Lebanon. However, not all the boats departing to Italy arrive at their destination. In a number of cases, the boats were adrift at sea for several days with no food or water, between Italian, Maltese and Greek SAR zones. From the boats adrift at sea off Southern Greece, there have been reports of rescues, deaths on board and people going missing, while some boats were allegedly pushed back to Turkey. The increased use of these routes is the result of people being forced into ever more dangerous migration routes to avoid the systemic violence and pushbacks at EU external borders, and the lack of safe and legal migration routes.

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6 The Greek authorities' standard procedure in Evros and standard practice generally on the mainland is to first arrest every newly arrived asylum seeker and then to proceed to their registration.
7 For an overview of the incident of the 38 refugees in Evros and the debate that it sparked, indicatively see: Deutsche Welle, Is Greece failing to deploy EU-funded surveillance system at Turkish border as intended?, 8 September 2022, https://bit.ly/3LMKK5Z. At the same time, the Minister of Migration and Asylum continues to fuel the polarized public discussion before the Parliament and in interviews, such as in Hellenic Republic, Ministry of Migration and Asylum, Νότης Μηταράκης: Κάποιος οργάνωσε τους 38 του Έβρου και μετά έφυγε προς άγνωστη κατεύθυνση, 24 September 2022, (in Greek): https://bit.ly/3R6DzFz; GCR continues to highlight that, despite the escalating controversy, it will keep on serving its statutory purpose of supporting and advocating for vulnerable people. Relevant statement available here: GCR statement in the aftermath of recent announcements on the case of the 38 refugees, https://bit.ly/3BFNopu.
Inadequate SAR Operations led to death of a 4-year-old Syrian girl and further human tragedy

On 6 September, 61 people, including 21 children, from Syria, Palestine and Lebanon, who were reportedly stranded for 10 days aboard a fishing boat in the Mediterranean Sea, were rescued by a cargo vessel (BBC Pearl) in the Maltese SAR zone, and hours later disembarked on the Greek island of Crete.  

According to testimonies, the boat sailed from Tripoli, Lebanon, on 27 August. Around 5 days later, the boat started to take on water and the people on board, left without water and food, sent an SOS using a satellite phone. On 4 September, the boat was reportedly adrift near the coasts of Malta and Italy. Maltese authorities did not conduct a rescue operation despite the boat being in the Maltese SAR area. Merchant vessels passing by did not assist them, and in one instance were not given authorization to do so by the Maltese authorities. Finally, on 6 September, the BBC Pearl approached the boat. According to survivors’ accounts shared with GCR, people had to use a rope to climb onto and jump into the vessel to rescue themselves. Those unable to climb suffered severe injuries. Two people did not manage to board at all.

A 4-year-old Syrian girl who also boarded the BBC Pearl, fell into a coma due to dehydration. Following the Maltese authorities’ delayed communication with the Hellenic coast guard, a Greek navy helicopter airlifted the unconscious girl and her 23-year-old mother to a Greek hospital, but the child was pronounced dead on arrival. Following the survivors’ arrival on Crete, an 8-months pregnant woman was transferred to the hospital where she lost her baby, while half of the group were hospitalized for days.

Ten of the people rescued by the BBC Pearl have been accused of smuggling, despite the fact that 7 of them were traveling together with their families and the remaining 3 are children. This is yet another example of a broader pattern of refugees being criminalized for seeking asylum in Greece, while the Maltese and the Greek authorities continue to violate international and European law by systematically failing to provide assistance at sea and not responding promptly or effectively to distress calls. The state authorities involved should immediately carry out an effective investigation into the facts that led to the death and/or disappearance of persons on board and any related responsibility.

This is not an isolated incident. On 10 August, 29 people were rescued during an air and sea rescue operation between Rhodes and Crete Island, after a boat of migrants setting sail from Antalya, Turkey and heading to Italy sank in the Aegean Sea. Around 50 people who were on board are missing, according to UNHCR.

There are also reports of people being pushed back to Turkey. For instance, according to Alarm Phone and the Aegean Boat Report, on 4 September, around 60 people in distress near Crete were pushed back to Turkish waters and abandoned in 3 life rafts by the Greek authorities.

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15 As above.
On 20 September, a boat with 53 migrants (including 5 children) sailing from Lebanon that had been at sea for 4 days sent out a distress signal in the south of Crete (in the Greek SAR zone). All the authorities were informed yet no one intervened to rescue the passengers. According to the Alarm Phone, it has been confirmed by relatives that the people on this boat were pushed back to Turkey by the Greek authorities all the way from the south of Crete.

3. The EU-funded Closed Controlled Access Centres on the Eastern Aegean Islands

Samos: one year after the opening of the EU funded prison-like centre

The Samos Closed Controlled Access Center (CCAC), which has an official capacity for 2,040 people, currently hosts around 1,150 asylum applicants. One year after its inauguration, the CCAC is still not yet fully operational. This means that in practice, the majority of the facilities hailed as significant improvements by the European Commission and the Greek authorities - such as restaurant and communal areas, shared kitchens, distribution points for non-food items as well as playgrounds and recreational areas, have never been used. Additionally, the centre’s Medical and Psychosocial Unit (staffed by EODY, the National Organization for Public Health), still has no doctor on staff. A doctor ‘loaned’ by the already under-staffed Samos General Hospital, occasionally visits the facility. This makeshift solution jeopardizes residents’ health, as there is no one to provide medical first aid or to assess daily health risks in the CCAC. In combination with the centre’s remote location and the fee imposed for buses to the city centre, this severely impedes residents’ effective access to healthcare. Moreover, the lack of full-time medical staff hinders adequate and timely vulnerability and age assessments, procedural safeguards that have a significant impact on the outcome of individuals’ asylum procedure.

18 https://migration.gov.gr/statistika/
19 Information received during GCR-Oxfam’s visit to Samos CCAC, on 15 September 2022.
21 For more information see the GCR-Oxfam Bulletin, March 2022: https://bit.ly/3BWAlud
22 Information acquired during GCR-Oxfam’s visit to Samos CCAC, on 15 September 2022.
23 For more information with regard to the “social exclusion - unaffordable transport to the city centre”, see GCR report (in Greek), Η Νέα Κλειστή Ελεγχόμενη Δομή Σάμου: Μία Απομονωμένη "Σύγχρονη Φυλακή", 18 November 2021: https://bit.ly/3SzjZ2h
The confinement of asylum applicants remains a primary objective. Following an illegal de facto detention practice implemented in the first months of the centre’s operation, from mid-April 2022, administrative delays in the issuance of the applicants’ cards resulted in them not being allowed to exit the centre. For roughly the past 3 months, a new general rule applies an unjustified 25-day movement restriction to new arrivals. According to the administration of Samos CCAC, all newly arrived asylum applicants are only permitted to exit the centre after 25 days, despite being fully identified and registered within the first 5 days of their arrival. Therefore, there is no justification for the extension of the restriction of residents’ freedom of movement which the law provides by way of exception. According to UNHCR, the 25-day movement restriction does not include the five or more days of mandatory quarantine, applied upon arrival of asylum applicants. As stated in previous Bulletins, this measure is clearly discriminatory as it is no longer imposed on anyone else entering Greece.

Lesvos: Construction of the new EU-funded CCAC in a forest

On 19 August, a Greek Council of State decision paved the way for the continued construction of a new EU funded closed controlled access centre in a 71,250 km² forest in Vastria, on Lesvos island.

This remote location will exclude any possibility for refugees’ social integration and hinder their effective access to services, while increasing the risk of arbitrary administrative practices and violations of asylum seekers’ rights outside of the public eye.

24 Joint Statement by 22 NGOs, One year since Greece opened new “prison-like” refugee camps, 22 NGOs call for a more humane approach, 20 September 2022: https://bit.ly/3rztqsd
27 For more information, see the GCR-OXFAM-SCI Bimonthly Bulletin, July 2022: https://bit.ly/3SGPUmn
Moreover, the site lacks essential infrastructure such as water supply and sewage, electricity, waste-management and public roads, while the construction and operation of the facility will have disastrous and irreversible consequences for the environment.²⁹ The North Aegean regional government and villages neighbouring the site opposed the construction,³⁰ contrary to the European Commission’s statement that the new centres will benefit local communities.³¹ In addition, members of the North Aegean Fire Department and neighbouring villages’ elected representatives raised serious concerns over the high risk of wildfire in a forest area with no fire safety zones.³² The high risk of fires and the lack of resources to adequately respond is an ongoing safety hazard on Lesvos. In the current Mavrovouni camp, regular fire incidents³³ due to electrical short-circuits, resulted in the destruction of rubber halls and containers even though it is located only 5km from Mytilene centre and the fire brigade. Moreover, a recent fire³⁴ on Lesvos resulted in the destruction of more than 20,000 km² of land and dozens of houses due to an understaffed fire brigade and inadequate state resources. Therefore, plans for this EU funded site that is even more remote and surrounded by a forest raise urgent concerns over the potential risk to hundreds of people’s lives. According to the Greek Migration Minister, the Lesvos CCAC will be fully constructed by February 2023.³⁵

In July 2022, the European Ombudsperson opened an own-initiative inquiry, asking the European Commission how it ensures fundamental rights are respected in EU-funded migration centres in Greece.³⁶

4. Violent camp closures and overcrowding

In mid-August, amid consecutive violent evacuations carried out without prior notice and with the involvement of riot police, the residents of Elaionas camp - one of the main accommodation facilities for refugees in Athens - were removed from the premises. While some were transferred to other camps, it remains unclear where many others ended up.³⁷

³⁰ For local objections against the construction of a CCAC on Lesvos, see also GCR-Oxfam Bulletin, March 2022, pp.5-6: https://bit.ly/3yoiT6F
³⁴ NewsBulletin247, Fire in Lesvos: Thousands of acres were given over to flames, 25 July 2022: https://bit.ly/3xXmcD
³⁷ The video is demonstrative of the incidents that took place in mid – August: Police broke into Elaionas refugee camp in Athens, Documento, Ελαιώνας: Συνεχίζεται η βίαια καταστολή – Εισβολή των ΜΑΤ στη δομή και πέντε προσαγωγές (Video) (in Greek), 19 August 2022, https://bit.ly/3fmBXMS
Meanwhile, hundreds of Yezidi refugees who recently fled from Iraq were left homeless for days outside Serres camp in the north of Greece, without access to water, as the camp had exceeded its capacity. After extensive negative publicity, the Ministry organized the transfer of this group to Lagadikia Camp, outside of Thessaloniki.

The violent camp closures take place against the backdrop of the termination of the ESTIA accommodation programme for vulnerable asylum seekers and refugees, and the Government’s plans to transfer those still hosted in ESTIA apartments to camps.

5. Ongoing difficulties with online pre-registration platforms

An online pre-registration platform for asylum applications was launched, modelled on the online platform for the pre-registration of temporary protection for Ukrainians. This comes after a long period of about ten months during which asylum seekers who had entered Greece without having undergone first reception procedures had no access to the asylum procedure.

From 1 September people who want to enter the asylum procedure book appointments for their registration through the platform. On the date of their appointment, individuals have to proceed to the new camps Malakasa and Diavata in South and North Greece respectively. These camps are far from the urban centres where most asylum seekers live and are extremely difficult to reach as no provisions have been made for asylum seekers’ transport. The camps started operating with understaffed and under-resourced Mobile Units of the Reception and Identification Service (RIS), yet these units continue to lack the medical and psychosocial personnel required for first reception procedures. This lack of political will by the Greek government to provide first reception services and conduct adequate registration procedures for refugees and migrants has left hundreds of people unregistered and vulnerable to detention.

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UNHCR as well as individuals who went for their registration reported that those who arrive at the camps for their asylum registration are obliged to remain in the camps for 25 days, restricting their freedom of movement. During this restriction of their freedom of movement, asylum seekers complete their asylum interview and wait for the first instance decision on their case. If the individual’s decision is negative, they are permitted to leave the camp, yet no specific instructions are provided regarding the competent Regional Asylum Office for submission of their appeal or their right for free legal aid in the second instance of their asylum procedure, further obstructing individuals’ effective access to asylum and due process.

Moreover, in some cases, the registration appointments given were as late as January 2024, and shortly after, the platform ceased to provide any new appointments at all for several weeks. During this time, the Regional Asylum Offices also refused to provide appointments in exceptional cases and to people with significant vulnerabilities, instead referring everyone to the online platform. This left asylum seekers undocumented, vulnerable to arrest and detention, without access to basic asylum seekers’ rights such as healthcare. The platform has now resumed the provision of appointments, with dates until March 2023. According to information provided by the National Legal Aid Actors’ Working Group, some individuals who were given very distant appointments received earlier dates by email notification, though it remains unclear why only specific individuals benefited from this rescheduling. It is also unclear whether authorities inform beneficiaries of new appointments by means other than email, which is rarely used by refugees and migrants, constituting a further administrative barrier to their access to asylum procedures.

Another online platform was launched on 22 August for the registration of subsequent asylum applications. Similar issues emerged, as the appointments are given for very distant dates, for example, individuals who received their appointments at the end of September, were given dates in May 2023, leading to 8 months of legal limbo and lack of access to their rights.

This dysfunctional procedure was similarly unavailable to Ukrainians who were not eligible for temporary protection. GCR assisted an undocumented, vulnerable Ukrainian woman, who had resided in Greece for many years (long before 26 November 2021). The single-parent woman nonetheless had the right to apply for asylum, however, as the online registration platform did not provide new appointments she was effectively excluded from international protection for several months.

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6. Unaccompanied children in Greece

Barriers to integration: M.M.’s story

M.M. arrived in 2017 in Greece from Pakistan as an unaccompanied child. For 5 months he was detained in the Fylakio Reception and Identification Center, in Greece’s Evros region, where he applied for asylum. His asylum application was examined under the fast-track procedure and without a guardian to consult him for the procedure that would follow. While waiting for his asylum decision, M.M. was transferred to a shelter for unaccompanied children in Thessaloniki and enrolled in school.

M.M. said “I attended the first two classes of senior high school with enthusiasm and my teachers and classmates offered me great support! When my asylum decision came out and it was negative, I had to abandon school. It was in the middle of the school year, but I had to find a job to survive”.

M.M. found a job working in the fields in southern Greece, in conditions entirely unsuitable for his age. “I had no choice, but to survive. My life changed 360 degrees from one moment to another and everything I managed to build was turned upside down, vanished”. M.M. appealed the rejection of his asylum claim and the Court decided that the claim was not examined correctly in violation of the relevant legal provisions regarding children, that stipulate that cases of UAMs are examined under the regular rather than the fast-track procedure and referred his case back for re-examination. During this time, M.M. turned 18 and all safeguards deriving from the regular asylum procedure were not applied, in violation of the principle of the best interests of the child. His case was rejected again. M.M said, “Now, I am ‘invisible’ to society and live in constant fear of arrest. My life has the sole purpose of survival. My development has been put on eternal pause”.

Continuation of education is crucial for the development and integration of unaccompanied children and those who have reached adulthood, however unfortunately M.M.’s case is only one of many. In Greece UAMs and children reaching adulthood whose asylum cases are rejected face severe difficulties in accessing social rights and integration as they do not possess the required legal documents. There is therefore an urgent need to create a legal framework to effectively protect children and young adults during this vulnerable period.

As of 1 October 2,352, unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) are estimated to be in Greece, an increase compared to previous months (in August there were 2,023 UAMs and in September 2,224).44

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44 Ministry of Migration and Asylum, Special Secretary for the Protection of UAMs, Updated Situation: Unaccompanied Minors (UAMs) in Greece, 1 October 2022, https://bit.ly/3rsksjY. According to Ministry of Migration and Asylum / Special Secretary for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors, this number includes 39 separated children, accompanied by an adult who is not their primary legal guardian and 11 children from Ukraine, accompanied by 3 caretakers.
Legal protection of unaccompanied children and children reaching adulthood

In July, Deputy Minister of Migration Sophia Voultepsi and Special Secretary for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors Heracles Moskof announced the need for a special regulation to ensure the legal protection of unaccompanied children in Greece and for children reaching adulthood.\(^45\) The proposed regulation was supposed to be put in place in September yet it is still pending.\(^46\) Greece must urgently follow other EU countries such as Italy and Spain in adopting a special residence permit for children who have reached adulthood and who are not in possession of legal documents. Without such permits, young adults are unable to attend school or to receive the social assistance and the support they require for their integration into Greek society.

Education – removals hinder school attendance

Despite the positive steps undertaken by the Ministry of Education in the last school year, and the announcements made at the beginning of the school year 2022-23 for an upgraded education system and improved school integration of refugee students, including the establishment of reception classes,\(^47\) numerous shortcomings remain in school enrolment, attendance, and transportation. At the beginning of the school year, Greek Refugee Education Coordinators\(^48\) reported that a significant number of children with their families have moved within Greece, due to the above-mentioned termination of the ESTIA accommodation program. This forced students to leave their school and enrol in new schools in other regions, disrupting their education and integration into the school community, an essential part of children’s development and wellbeing.\(^49\)

The new asylum application system introduced on 1 September 2022 (see above), is also impeding school enrolment and attendance, as the electronic lodge of the asylum claim does not provide asylum seekers with an official document serving as a proof of their application, rendering children and their families ‘invisible’ to the state until the registration of their asylum claim at one of the competent RICs.\(^50\) Without being able to prove the legality of their residence, children often face difficulties in school enrolment, as an identity document and proof of vaccination booklet are usually requested during enrolment, despite not being a legal requirement. Finally, families’ fear of being deprived of their freedom of movement or arrested (see section 5 above), deters parents from approaching public authorities generally, including schools.

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\(^{45}\) Following a special event organized the 12 of July by Child Rights Advocacy Network (CRAN) - where more than 30 civil society organizations participate.

\(^{46}\) CRAN network has addressed a letter of reminder to Deputy Migration Minister together with the expression of the will to assist in the completion of the relative legislative changes; changes that need to be adapted to UAMs’ reality (e.g., lack of passport or other documents proving their identity).


\(^{48}\) Refugee Education Coordinators (RECs) are permanent schoolteachers appointed to serve as mediators between the official school system and the refugee and asylum-seeking families, see report of GCR / Save the Children, Back to school? Refugee Children in Greece denied right to education, September 2021, p.2, https://www.gcr.gr/media/k2/attachments/Education_in_Greece_Report_Final_Edits_(002)_(1).pdf.

\(^{49}\) Information shared during a meeting of Education Working Group for Refugee Education for Northern Greece the 28 September 2022.

\(^{50}\) See p. 8
School attendance is further obstructed by a shortage of school buses, resulting from administrative failures, such as a lack of procurement procedures for transportation or failed tenders.

**New law on guardianship**

In July, a new law on guardianship (L. 4960/2022) was published, passing on the general competency of guardianship to the Special Secretary for the Protection of UAMs of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, from the National Center for Social Solidarity of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. Under the new law, the provision of guardianship is relegated to a list of legal entities appointed by the Prosecutor (i.e., public entities, NGOs, international organizations) who collaborate with persons acting as guardians. The Prosecutor can also appoint a child’s family member or friend to be responsible for their everyday care.

However, Ministerial Decisions are yet to be issued for the full implementation of the new law. Currently, until the relevant Ministerial Decisions are issued, the former guardianship law is still in force regarding the Public Prosecutor acting as temporary guardian for unaccompanied children.

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52 Former L. 4554/2018 defined the competent entities for the provision of guardianship to be adults in close relation with the minor or professional guardians, all appointed by the Juvenile Prosecutor or, where not applicable, the Prosecutor of First Instance who was acting as a temporary guardian of the child.
Recommendations

The European Union and its Member States should:

1. The EU Commission should take swift disciplinary action and launch infringement proceedings against the Greek state for its well-documented, long-term, and systematic breaches of international and EU law in its treatment of asylum seekers and refugees, including pushbacks, obstruction of access to asylum and arbitrary detention.

2. Meet their obligations of cooperation and coordination in SAR operations, in accordance with their international obligations on rescue at sea.

3. Initiate criminal investigations into national authorities’ responsibility in cases of shipwrecks and loss of life in the Mediterranean Sea.

4. Stop funding and abandon the policy of remote, “prison-like” centres and containment camps.

The Greek Government should:

1. Respect the binding decisions on interim measures granted by the European Court of Human Rights on not removing asylum seekers from Greek territory, providing them with food, water, adequate medical care and transferring them immediately to reception centres and refrain from the illegal practice of pushbacks.

2. Respond promptly and efficiently to distress calls and swiftly rescue people at sea in line with its international obligations.

3. Refrain from misusing counter-smuggling legislation to criminalize refugees.

4. Abandon the policy and implementation of closed centres and lift all unjustified restrictions of asylum seekers’ freedom of movement.

5. Amend and improve the online pre-registration platform to ensure prompt appointments for registration, giving priority to vulnerable people.

6. Maintain ESTIA accommodation unless suitable alternative arrangements of the same standard are provided, and provide medical and psychosocial services to vulnerable asylum seekers.

7. Ensure all closures of camps or accommodation sites are non-violent and communicated to residents well in advance, and that children who are transferred are enrolled and supported in attending school in their new locations.
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This paper was written by Alkistis Agrafioti Chatzigianni, Kleio Nikolopoulou and Eleni Pasia, and edited by Stephanie Pope and Daniel Gorevan. The bulletin is an initiative of the Greek Council for Refugees, Oxfam and Save the Children to provide a bimonthly update on the situation for refugees and migrants in Greece.

Cover photo: Pedro Armestre / Save the Children