

Briefing on the suspension of asylum applications in Greece

The information shared in this briefing is based on desk research as well as reports shared with the Border Violence Monitoring Network, Equal Legal Aid as well as other organisations offering free legal support in Greece. It concerns the suspension of the possibility to submit asylum applications in the country in 2025, and covers the period the suspension was in force from July to October.

I. Context

Suspension of asylum applications

On July 11, 2025, the Hellenic Parliament passed a legislative [amendment](#) to the Law 5218/2025 suspending the submission of asylum applications from third country nationals (TCNs) entering the Greek territory by sea from North Africa, for a period of three months (Article 79). The amendment provides that people who arrived via this route were to be returned “without registration” to their country of origin or provenance. The Greek Ministry of Migration and Asylum stated that their [objective](#) was to detain third-country nationals (TCNs) and to expedite return procedures, as well as to act as a deterrent against departures from Libya to reach Greek territory.

Reactions from civil society and human rights monitoring bodies

The amendment was condemned for violating international and EU law instruments by [109 civil society organisations](#) - including [RSA](#), [Amnesty International](#), and [Human Rights Watch](#). Other human rights monitoring bodies and institutional and legal actors, such as the [Greek Ombudsman](#), the [Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights](#) and the [UNHCR](#), also reacted against the ban.

Consequences for TCNs who arrived after the adoption of the ban

The first arrivals of people affected by the suspension [took place](#) on 19 July. They were quickly transferred to Athens, before being brought to various Pre-Removal Detention Centres (PRDCs) on the mainland, including, at least, [Amygdaleza](#) (Attica region) and [Paranesti](#) and [Xanthi](#) (Northern Greece). The Greek Council for Refugees (GCR) [visited](#) Amygdaleza on 25 July, reported poor and undignified detention conditions and was informed by the detention centre authorities that “your clients are not entitled to apply for asylum.” A Controlled Access Facility for Temporary Accommodation of Asylum Seekers in Northern Greece, based in [Sintiki](#), in the Regional Unit of Serres, was also used to detain TCNs subject to the suspension. Further information pertaining to this site is detailed below. On 15 September, based on a letter sent to the [Greek Ombudsman](#) by the General Directorate for Border Management and Migration, up to 48 persons were detained in Paranesti, 24 in Xanthi, 198 in Amygdaleza, and 973 in the Special Detention Facility of Sintiki.

From its [inception](#), the ban was not implemented consistently, with different practices applied depending on the nationality of the new arrivals. Despite arriving after July 11, some people had been transferred directly to Registration and Identification Centres (RICs), and then to different open camps on the mainland. At that time, no public information was provided as to the reasons why certain people were exempted from the ban. At the end of September, it was [revealed](#) that internal circulars had been issued to that effect, excluding some [categories](#) of people from the suspension of asylum applications. The first, issued in mid-July, excluded TCNs identified as vulnerable from the suspension, such as elderly people, single-parent families with minors, and single women. This measure is not in line with Greek Law 4939/2022, which includes a much longer non-exhaustive list of groups considered as vulnerable (Article 1), and provides that vulnerable people shall be identified during the registration and medical examination procedures (Article 62(2)). The most recent internal circular is from mid-September and exempts Sudanese and Eritrean nationals from the ban. They were consequently [transferred](#) to the Malakasa RIC and the camp in Serres, where a [Mobile Unit for Registration](#) began operating on 29 July, to have their asylum applications registered.

Transfers by ship from Crete to the mainland

Conditions during the transfers from Crete to the mainland were [denounced](#) and described as “unacceptable”, “inhuman” and shameful by Associations of police officers in Crete. In addition to an insufficient number of accompanying police staff, they highlight that hundreds of people were transferred in a big open and overcrowded space designed for the transportation of military vehicles during a 30-hour journey, in the middle of a heatwave, [without proper ventilation](#) and without previous medical screening.

II. Detention conditions in the Sintiki facility

Detention and demographics in [Sintiki](#) (or “Kleidi” camp)

In order to detain TCNs subject to the suspension, State authorities [converted](#) the facility in Sintiki, an accommodation structure designated to house asylum seekers in the Regional Unit of Serres, into a closed detention centre. It is worth noting that the Sintiki facility is [listed](#) as a “Controlled Access Facility for Temporary Accommodation of Asylum Seekers” on the Ministry of Migration and Asylum’s website, which, under Greek Law and Article 13(1) of the [Ministerial Decision 23/13532](#), shall be an open structure in which TCNs can “enjoy freedom of movement” and “the right to enter and leave the facility”. However, the structure was then referred to in official documents, including detention orders delivered to TCNs held in the facility, as a “Special Detention Facility of Serres” (“Ειδική Εγκατάσταση Κράτησης Σερρών”). In the Greek [Ombudsman report](#), it is stated that “The Special Detention Facility (SDF) of Sintiki has been in operation since 29 July 2025, following its transfer to the Hellenic Police (EL.AS.) by the Ministry of Migration and Asylum and its conversion into a Special Detention Facility within the Temporary Accommodation Structure of Sintiki, specifically occupying part of that structure”.

The structure in Sintiki has a maximum capacity limit of [733 people](#), according to official data provided by the Ministry of Migration and Asylum. [Transfers](#) to the facility from Crete and Gavdos started on July 29, with at least 650 people taken to Sintiki by August. Estimates of between [800-900 people](#) were present in the facility at any one time, far exceeding its [capacity](#). The facility was reportedly divided into four compounds each containing an estimate of 300-400 people of different nationalities, including women, who had their own containers and separate bathrooms.

Some additional [police staff](#), including [border guards from the Evros Prefecture](#), were mobilised and transferred to Sintiki to support the security team on site.

Lack of interpretation and information provided by the authorities

Reports from detainees showed that, at least up until September, there were generally [no interpretation services](#) provided within the structure. Detainees were requested to sign detention and return orders without the presence of interpreters and therefore without knowledge of the documents' contents.

[People](#) expressed confusion and reported having no access to information about their rights and the procedures they were subject to. People struggled to understand why they were not allowed to apply for asylum and were detained, also explaining that their requests for information from staff present in the facility were ignored or dismissed.

Detention conditions

Corroborating [media reports](#), people detained in [Sintiki](#) described prison-like [living conditions](#).

1. Lack of food

The food provided to detainees was described as critically insufficient to meet their nutritional needs, and served only once a day, leading to reports of people [fainting from hunger](#).

2. Access to healthcare

Reports reveal that no medical screening had taken place before the first week of September, despite people having already been detained in the facility for at least a month. Requests to access the camp's medical clinic, staffed by the [Hippocrates programme](#), were routinely ignored. Among those who did manage to access the clinic, many were reportedly taken there [handcuffed](#). A lack of interpretation services as well as limited [medical staff](#) and [medication](#) further hindered access. Detainees described only receiving paracetamol and no specialised treatment for more serious medical conditions, including contagious skin conditions. Despite great need, psychological support was also not available.

3. Overcrowding

As confirmed by the [Greek Ombudsman](#), between 800-900 people were held in the facility, exceeding its capacity already by late [August](#). Between 8 and 15 people were reportedly accommodated in one container, in an area of less than 20 square meters and with an insufficient number of [beds and mattresses](#), resulting in some having to sleep on the floor.

4. Hygiene and lack of provision of non-food items

Various reports confirm poor hygiene conditions in the facility. Shower and bathroom facilities were reportedly limited, causing tensions among people as they had to queue to access them. People have also [not been provided with soap](#) or toothpaste, as well as [clothes](#), with many wearing the same clothes as during their journey from Libya, despite nighttime temperatures falling below 5°C. In addition, some detainees reportedly had to remain barefoot as they were not provided with shoes, or wore the same open shoes as they had arrived in.

Many people also reported having [lice](#) and complained about the impossibility to shave. Finally, reports mentioned cockroach infestations within the facility, as well as the presence of snakes in the camp which created additional fear given the lack of access to medical care.

Incidents of racism and violence from police, reported in August 2025

Two [incidents](#) of violence were reported in August within the facility in Sintiki:

- The media outlet [Efsyn](#) reported that on August 12, violent fights broke out between TCNs from different nationalities in the facility. One person was injured in the head and brought to the hospital in Serres.
- On August 18, six detainees attempted to escape from the facility, but were apprehended by the police. All persons who tried to escape were arrested and [sentenced](#) to six months in [Nigrita prison](#). Following the incident, the Serres Association of Police Officers [spoke up](#) about the volatility of the situation in the centre, expressing concern for its hasty operationalisation and structural shortcomings.

In addition, accounts of racism and violence from the facility's staff were also given. This includes racist [verbal abuse](#).

Protests and hunger strike silenced by force

On August 19, around 260 detainees in Sintiki initiated a [protest](#) in reaction to police violence. In addition to continuous detention and the impossibility to apply for asylum, their main demands concerned their detention conditions. The protest was reportedly met with [violence](#) by police officers in charge of the security of the camp.

Discriminative and arbitrary exemptions from the suspension

Over the week-end of September 20-21, Sudanese and Eritrean people were [transferred](#) from Sintiki to the camp in Serres in order to have their asylum application registered. Other [nationalities](#) remained detained, some despite having a 'refugee profile' such as Yemenis, who

have a recognition rate of almost 100% in Greece. This discrepancy caused confusion and indignation among the remaining detainees, as it was considered arbitrary and untransparent.

III. On the effects of the suspension of asylum applications

While arrival rates did decrease after the suspension of the right to apply for asylum on July 11, 2025, it is unclear whether this drop can be causally attributed to this unlawful amendment or other factors, such as [bad weather conditions](#) in August. Indeed, crossings rose again in September, with [around 900 people](#) reaching Gavdos and Crete between 12-15 September.

Therefore, in addition to not having the expected effect, the suspension led to the overcrowding of detention centres and critical [lack of coordination between authorities](#). While before the suspension, newly arrived TCNs on the islands of Gavdos and Crete were transferred within a couple days - up to 10 days at most - to reception facilities on the mainland, transfers were frozen from mid-August, with [hundreds of people](#) held for more than a month in unsuitable structures, as no appropriate and official reception facility was built on either of these islands. Conditions in these structures have been [widely described](#) as undignified, to the extent that even health workers [stated](#) that "they can no longer provide services" in the former exhibition centre in Agia, Chania used to accommodate TCNs.