

“Mentally, physically, and practically, life is not possible here”:

People continue to suffer in Greece’s mainland refugee camps



3rd April 2025

Since our report [Voices from the Camps](#) was published in July 2024, living conditions and access to services in Greece’s mainland refugee camps have not improved. Nine months later, people are still isolated and unable to access their basic rights. There have been deaths of residents as well as reports of worsening conditions from people living in camps.

For this follow-up report, Mobile Info Team (MIT) and Refugee Legal Support (RLS) spoke with residents of camps that we did not previously have contact with, as well as people we spoke to a year ago who continue to reside in the same facilities. Here, we highlight the enduring and serious deficiencies in living conditions for refugees in Greece.

Lack of access to healthcare

Despite the [Hippocrates](#) programme starting in July 2024, camps still do not have the required staff to provide residents with necessary medical and psychosocial support. In particular, there is an absence of psychiatrists and in multiple camps there continues to be no doctors. Many people still report that the assistance existing staff can offer is extremely limited and medication cannot be purchased as people are living without cash assistance. The absence of interpretation for medical appointments continues to be a serious issue reported by camp residents, as the Hippocrates programme does not include its own interpreters, thus relying on interpreters in the camps who may be overstretched or absent.

As camps are the only form of accommodation that the Greek state provides to asylum seekers, even those with multiple medical issues and serious vulnerabilities reside in camps. For example, we are in contact with a person who is in a wheelchair, suffers from epilepsy, and is completely paralysed. This person explained that they receive no assistance in the camp* in which they are accommodated and are left to fend for themselves. They are unable to use the bathroom and must urinate into a water bottle.

Similarly, in Malakasa camp, we spoke with someone suffering from pain throughout their body, who is unable to walk long distances. The walk to the train station is around 1.7km but takes them two hours. They must endure this walk and then risk travelling without a ticket, if they want to access hospitals in Athens.

* camp not specified to protect anonymity

Even where medical staff and interpreters are available, residents report feeling unable to address their medical issues in a camp environment. A woman from Syria in Oinofyta camp shared:

“I know we’re the “lucky” ones, in some camps there are no doctors, but I cannot express myself to the doctor here. Once I had a panic attack even trying to explain to him”

Residents in Serres camp in Northern Greece described feeling frustration and fear at the lack of adequate medical care. People with chronic medical conditions explained that there was a lack of treatment available to them, as they require specialists and follow-up. Pregnant women in Serres also shared that they could not go for necessary medical appointments at the hospital unless they paid the taxi fare of approximately 10 euros. Some camp residents therefore cannot afford to attend their medical appointments. This inability to access medical care was highlighted in our report of July 2024 and continues to be reported by residents of all camps that we spoke to.

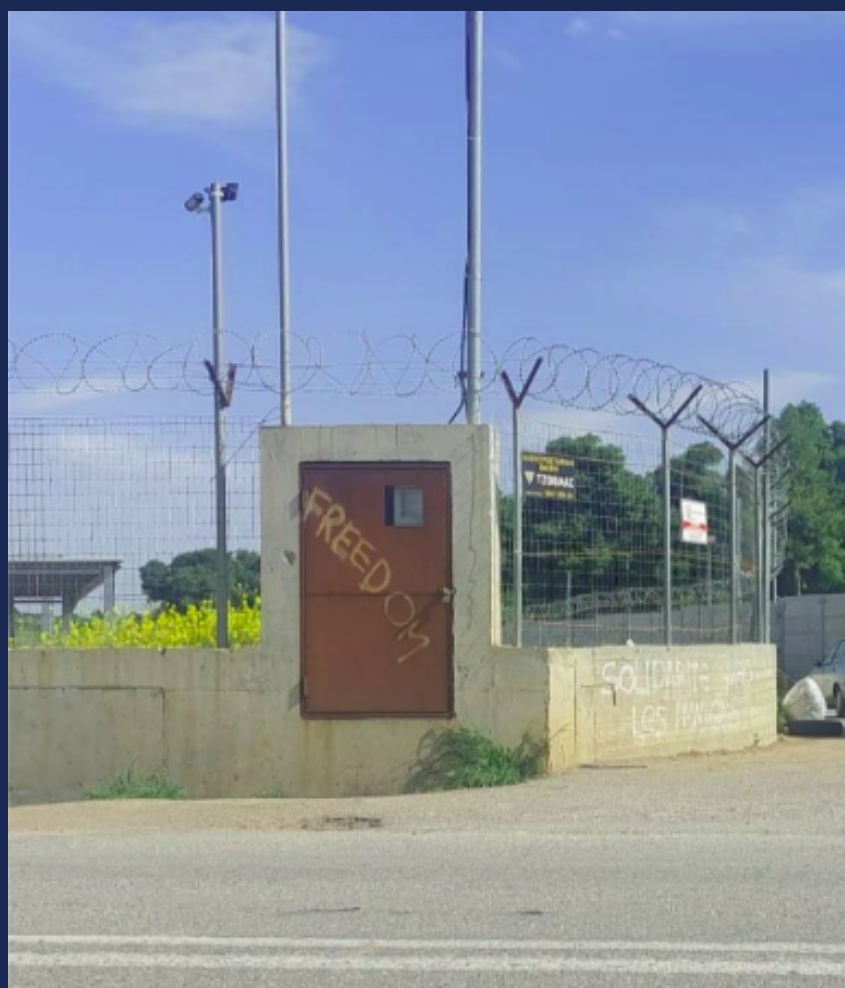


Photo: Graffiti outside Ritsona camp, where a resident from Sierra Leone was found dead in his container in January 2025



Deaths of camp residents

In the last nine months there were deaths of residents in Greece's mainland refugee camps.

A five year old Syrian girl, resident in Schisto camp, died on 9th December 2024. [A media report](#) on the girl's death highlighted the lack of interpretation in the camp, as the family resorted to using a translation application on a mobile phone, in order to attempt communication with the doctor. The girl was taken to hospital by her parents due to a lack of transport provided by the Ministry of Migration and Asylum.

In Ritsona, a man from Sierra Leone was [found dead in his container](#) at the end of January 2025. Residents who saw his body were uncertain how long he had been dead inside. A woman from Sierra Leone explained:

"We don't know how long he was dead.. People were knocking his box for work on Monday and he didn't answer. The body stayed hours once it was found, then it disappeared. We wanted to be there when our brother was buried but nobody informed us. We wanted to see him buried to at least send a photo to his family. In the end some of our community went to his grave to send a photo for his children"



Inadequate and unsanitary living conditions

Since July 2024, a hot summer and a cold winter have passed. In Kavala camp in Northern Greece, residents reported air conditioning units breaking and camp staff sometimes being unable to fix them, often citing a lack of spare parts. Families in Koutsochero camp, an extremely isolated facility in central Greece, reported that toilets and kitchens are far away from accommodation containers, which felt unpleasant and unsafe as it got darker and colder in winter. We were also contacted by families in Sintiki camp, a remote facility close to the Bulgarian border, who shared that they were facing extreme cold with inadequate heating over winter.

A woman from Afghanistan in Thiva camp, an hour's journey from Athens, explained that she cannot sleep at night. She told us of feeling traumatised after arriving in Greece from a shipwreck and now living in a container with large holes in the floor:

"I wake up at night to check my kids, again and again, I am worried about animals coming in through the holes"



Photo: Thiva camp, where a woman from Afghanistan cannot sleep for fear that animals will come in through the holes of her family's container

Again, residents reported being transferred to camps without any preparation. In Malakasa camp, a Palestinian man reported families being transferred from the nearby Malakasa Reception and Identification Centre (RIC) having registered their claims for asylum, only to be left waiting for hours on the cold stone ground as there were no available containers for them. The containers they had been allocated were completely unprepared, lacking the bare essentials such as a fridge or heating and in a dilapidated condition. He said:

“there is a great negligence from the administration in the camp. The containers are not fit for human habitation, they have not been prepared, the families cannot survive there”



Photo: Newly transferred families in Malakasa camp wait in the cold on the floor as no containers are ready for them to live in, February 2025

A young man interviewed for our report of July 2024 is still resident in Kavala camp, a year after we first interviewed him. He explained that he used his own money to buy products to tackle a severe cockroach infestation in the old military barracks he is accommodated in.

“I had to spend money to fix the infestation problem myself, there are so many cockroaches, I had to buy products to fill the holes, and poison to kill the cockroaches”

In Malakasa camp too, a resident from Palestine spoke of cockroach infestations:

“I had cockroaches in my fridge. I asked [the camp management] for spray to kill them, [but] they told me they wouldn’t give, they said that this wasn’t a hotel!”

Residents in Oinofyta camp highlighted the inappropriateness of the entire facility, as it is an abandoned factory. Children with disabilities and adults with multiple vulnerabilities are among the old factory’s residents. A man from Syria said:

“This is not a place for humans. Here our existence is below zero. We made this journey to make a life for our children, not to die in Syria, but we could never have imagined conditions so bad. Mentally, physically and practically, life is not possible here.”

When questioned about the toilets at Oinofyta camp, a single mother exclaimed simply
“leave them to God!”

Systematic lack of essential items

Worryingly, there is still no systematic provision of essential non-food items (NFIs) in Greece’s camps. During all interviews, residents and their children were observed in winter weather wearing plastic sandals without socks or shoes with holes. Some necessary items, for example winter clothes, nappies, hygiene products like soap and shampoo as well as feminine hygiene products such as sanitary towels are provided to residents of camps. However, provision varies from camp to camp and in all camps these necessary items are not always provided to residents or not provided in the required amounts.

A woman from Afghanistan in Malakasa camp explained:

“Some weeks they give the women sanitary products, other weeks nothing ... so I’m sorry to say but if we have nothing for our period we have no choice but to bleed into our clothes. How can we speak about this? It is shameful, they make us feel dirty, they don’t care that we are women”

The young man in Kavala camp explained that he had to source essential items such as a stove. He also reported constant problems with the camp’s laundry machines.



Photo: Women in Thiva camp continue to wear plastic shoes without socks during winter months, due to lack of financial support and lack of provisions in camps

Inedible food, and not given to everyone

People continued to explain serious issues with the food provided in camps. Many people reported wanting to cook independently as the food provided by the camp was inedible. People described food that was sometimes cold, uncooked or expired. One man in Kavala camp reported receiving raw chicken and falling ill on two occasions. In Oinofyta, a single mother from Syria shared:

***“The kids get sick eating the food, the kids are often sick,
we cannot physically eat what we are given”***

Practices vary from camp to camp, regarding who is given food. A young woman from Somalia interviewed for our July 2024 report remains in Ritsona. At the time of our first interview, she was not provided with food as she had been refused asylum and was awaiting an appointment to submit a subsequent application. Now, she has been successful in her claim for asylum, so again she does not receive food as she has been granted refugee status. She is tolerated to stay within the camp because if she left she would be homeless - the only integration programme, Helios, ceased on 30 September 2024 and though its successor Helios+ has recently launched it is yet to be fully operational. She speaks clearly:

“The camp doesn't give me food or water. So how will I live?”



Isolation and no transportation

Camp residents still endure feelings of isolation and powerlessness. Children and other vulnerable groups are particularly negatively affected.

“I feel like these camps are a business. They are not places for humans to live. They are trading in human beings” said a Kurdish man in Oinofyta camp.

A Palestinian man in Ritsona further noted, ***“we are penned in here like animals. There is 24 hour security but no care for people”***.

A man from Syria in Malakasa continued, ***“we fled death and now we are stuck in the middle of the mountains, with no guidance”***.

As was the situation when our report was published in July 2024, there is no regular transportation organised by the Ministry of Migration and Asylum from camps to the cities. This means that people continue to be unable to reach essential services or appointments, even those hospital appointments booked by camp staff or necessary interviews at the Asylum Service to proceed with claims for asylum. People must find their own way, but have limited or no means to do so.



No financial support

Exacerbating the lack of essential items and absence of transportation, is that people seeking asylum in Greece still do not receive any financial support. This is despite there being clear provision in both Greek and EU law for cash assistance to asylum seekers, and EU funds being granted to Greece for this purpose.

In September 2024, 20 NGOs issued a joint statement, calling for the immediate resumption of cash assistance payments to people claiming asylum in Greece. The last payment people received was in October last year for the months of May and June 2024. In March 2025, this call was renewed with another statement. People we spoke to who have arrived in Greece in the last months were not even aware what a cashcard is - they have not received even a cent of financial support from the Greek government. A woman from Cameroon in Corinthos camp shared:

“I don’t even have pennies to buy biscuits for my child. Some people have family outside Greece, even outside Europe, to send money here. But if you don’t have family you have nothing”



Photo: Oinofyta camp, an old factory that residents describe as not fit for human habitation

A woman from Sierra Leone, interviewed in our report published in July 2024, reported that she has still - eight months later - not received any payments on her cashcard. Without money, and together with the lack of basic services, people are unable to access necessary medical treatment. She said:

“The doctor in the camp prescribed me medicine but what use is this? It is just a piece of paper. I cannot get the medicine if I do not have any money”

It is not legal to work in Greece until two months after registering a claim for asylum. Even once these two months have passed, people struggle to find employment opportunities. Without any money, people are unable to provide for themselves. This has a disastrous impact on wellbeing, especially on children. A woman from Afghanistan in Thiva camp said:

“Sometimes the school organises small trips for the children, but my daughter cannot go because I can’t pay even a few euros for the contribution. I have nothing. The other children tease her because she’s wearing summer clothes. Her feet are frozen in plastic sandals, I feel shame but what can I do? I cannot go shopping for anything, not even for my child”

Given people’s issues with the food provided in camps, the lack of financial support impacted people’s ability to have a balanced or sufficient diet. A single mother from Turkey in Oinofyta camp explained:

***“There is a kitchen in the camp but with what money will I buy food?
My children say they are hungry at school...”***

Protests in camps

Many people enquire about the possibility to file official complaints about the conditions in camps but do not know who to turn to. The official avenue, complaining to the Fundamental Rights Officer (FRO), is generally inaccessible and unworkable for camp residents, as it entails submitting detailed evidence in English or Greek only.

Given the grave issues highlighted above, residents of camps across Greece have been organising amongst themselves to draw attention to their plight and demand change. Peaceful sit-in protests took place in Kavala and Koutsochero camps in November 2024 and protests were held by residents of Malakasa in January 2025. We have also received footage from demonstrations and hunger strikes in Polykastro camp.



Photo: residents of Malakasa camp hold a peaceful demonstration outside the camp in January 2025

Renewed demands to the Greek authorities

It remains the case that camps on mainland Greece are inadequate and undignified, still failing to meet minimum legal standards and depriving people of their basic human rights.

We therefore continue to call on the Greek state to accommodate asylum seekers in apartments and houses in urban settings where they can access services, social networks and wider society.

Where camp accommodation is necessary, the state should ensure it is used for short-term stays only and residents have full and unrestricted access to basic rights including healthcare, information and legal support. We further call for the provision of regular and free transportation from camps to urban centres to facilitate residents' access to administrative and legal services as well as healthcare.