

# LESVOS SITUATION REPORT

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Developments and Updates

**July - December 2025**



LEGAL  
CENTRE  
LESVOS

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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As we look back at the last six months in Lesbos, it is difficult not to feel the futility of the words we keep putting to paper, month after month, year after year, documenting the always increasing draconian policies affecting the lives of people on the move and the normalisation of violence and migrant deaths. This is not only at Greece's border with Turkey in Lesbos, but across the globe. Pundits and politicians espouse blatant and often contradictory lies (with impunity) in order to push their agendas of hate, discrimination and exclusion. Islamophobic, transphobic, and racist views are framed as political positions and normalised within the public discourse around the world.

Greece has been no exception. The Greek Prime Minister has emphatically stated for years that illegal pushbacks of migrants are not happening, despite all the evidence to the contrary. In parallel, the Minister of Migration, Plevris, praises the work of the Hellenic Coast Guard in protecting Greece's borders and emphasises that it is his aim to punish people on the move. In the last six months he has followed through on these statements with new policies of expanded criminalisation and detention of migrants, and the unlawful and discriminatory suspension of asylum for all those arriving to Greece from the African continent.

Where does the work of human rights defenders fit when the rule of law itself has been trampled? When genocides are carried out on live feed unchecked, and the leader of the world's most powerful nation openly claims that he is not constrained by international law, but only by his own disreputable morals, further entrenching this feeling of impotence.

How many times can we report on the violation of migrant rights in Lesbos? On the degrading and inhuman conditions inherent in government-run camps; on the erosion of the right to seek asylum, on the incessant violent attacks against people on the move by the Hellenic Coast Guard (attacks which, since 2021, we have concluded constitute crimes against humanity due to their widespread and systematic nature)? How many times can we document and write about the erosion of migrant rights before those rights fail to have any meaning at all? For how long will we be counting the dead?

This Situation Report from Lesbos serves as a provisional answer to these questions. In the face of such violence, it is important to name the successes of the past six months. These include the acquittal of several LCL clients who were wrongfully accused; the historic initiation of criminal charges against twenty coast guard officers and commanders in the case of the state crime of Pylos; and, after seven years of uncertainty, the long overdue acquittal of the twenty-four defendants in the "ERCI" case by the court in Lesbos. Even as words feel increasingly hollow in this post-truth era, we also recognise the necessity, at a bare minimum, of creating a historic record not only of these successes but also of the violence we are witnessing: a record for today, and for some time in the future in which we have to believe there will be a reckoning for all the horrors of the present.

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# OVERALL SITUATION AND STATISTICS

## DEMOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW

Between July and December 2025, registered arrivals continued to be at low levels in comparison with past years. According to data from the [Ministry of Migration & Asylum](#), 2,119 people arrived in Lesbos from Turkey during this period. With the relatively low number of arrivals, the population of the Lesbos Closed Controlled Access Centre (CCAC) dropped over the summer, but rose again as arrivals increased in October and November, with 1,164 people residing in Lesbos' CCAC at the end of December 2025.

The processing of asylum claims for new arrivals remained relatively quick on the island over the reporting period, as did turnover of the camp population. In Lesbos, the vast majority of asylum seekers as of the end of December are from Afghanistan (31%), with a notable increase of arrivals from Yemen (18%), Sudan (16%), Somalia (13%) and Eritrea (6%).

Arrivals to Greece via Libya across the central Mediterranean continued to increase, accounting for nearly half of all arrivals to Greece in 2025, the majority arriving to Crete island. Throughout 2025 according to [UNHCR data](#), the majority of arrivals to Greece continue to be from Afghanistan (25%), Sudan (22%), Egypt (20%), and Syria (4%).



Screenshot of UNHCR Operation Data Portal, showing registered arrivals to Greece from Turkey in 2025.

## RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN CRETE AS MIGRANT ARRIVALS INCREASE

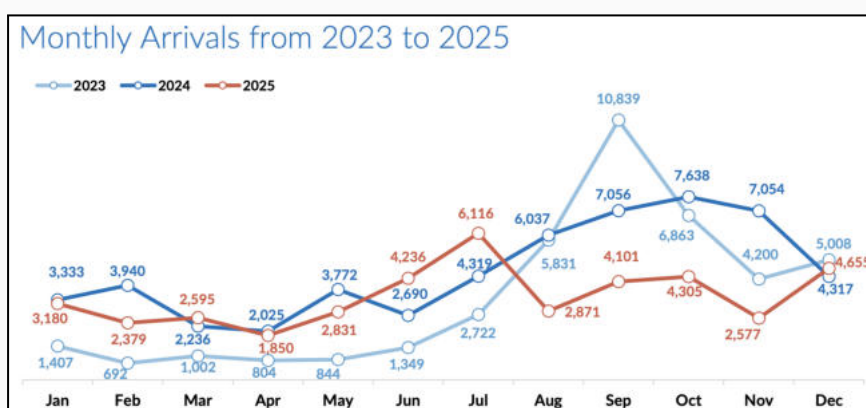
In response to the continued arrivals via the central Mediterranean, the Greek state has made efforts to curb migration via this route. On 11 July, on the initiative of the Minister of Migration, Plevris, Greek parliament passed a resolution to [suspend the right to seek asylum](#) for three months for migrants entering Greece from Libya and Northern Africa, in violation of the nonderogable right to seek asylum enshrined in the Refugee Convention, and Greek and European law. This suspension was denounced by [LCL and other human rights organisations](#) and [EU institutions](#). July's suspension of the right to asylum is the second time since the New Democracy led government has unlawfully suspended the right to asylum for migrants entering Greece. In March 2020, in breach of national and international law, [Greece suspended](#)

[the right to seek asylum](#) for a month. The suspension of asylum at that time in 2020 was in parallel to Greece's announcement that it would fortify its borders to prevent the entry of migrants traveling from Turkey, marking the period when Greece's attack on migrants in the Aegean sea became [widespread and systematic](#). This year, the suspension of asylum was also coupled with efforts to stem migration. On 30 July 2025, it was reported that [Libyan Coast Guard officers are being trained in Crete](#) under a bilateral "migration management" program, despite Libya's record of systematic torture, extrajudicial killing, and unlawful detention of migrants.

In July and August 2025, following the suspension of the right to access asylum procedures, hundreds of people, including children, were forcibly transported from Crete to detention centres in Northern Greece on overcrowded military vessels in suffocating heat. The government openly defended this practice despite [denunciations even from police unions](#), with the Ministry of Migration, Plevris, [stating on 31 July](#), that the people transported "are no guests, they are now prisoners" and that it was a "very correct transportation" on the overcrowded military vessel. Conditions in the sites to which people were transferred remained dire: more than 200 people detained in the closed camp of Sintiki [launched a hunger strike](#) to protest inhumane treatment, while 18 unaccompanied minors who were eventually moved to Lesbos arrived in visibly deteriorated health after multiple transfers across Greece and trauma survived in Libya. Following [the European Court of Human Right's condemnation](#) on 14 August 2025, and the [Athens Administrative Court decision](#) on the 25 August 2025 - both finding the suspension of the right to seek asylum unlawful - the Ministry [issued ad hoc circulars](#) selectively allowing certain nationalities, specifically Sudanese and Eritreans, to apply for asylum. These arbitrary exceptions only highlight the unlawfulness of the broader suspension and the exclusionary nature of the governments' migration policy objectives.

Meanwhile, the government announced plans for a [new closed detention infrastructure for migrants](#) in Crete, despite strong local opposition, and continues to detain migrants in overcrowded and horrendous conditions in warehouses in Crete prior to their [transfer off the island](#), now increasingly to Leros and Kos islands.

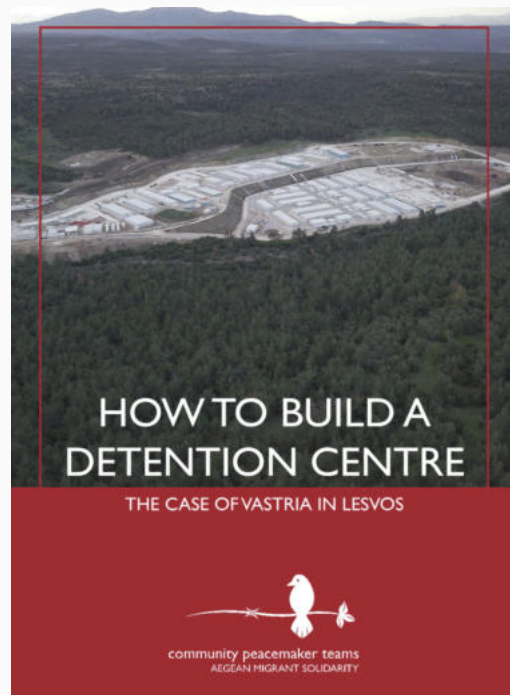
The suspension of asylum procedures and inhuman transfers failed to reduce arrivals however, as **over 1,150 people arrived in Gavdos and Crete in mid-September alone**. These developments confirm once again that Greece's deterrence-based migration policies are not only illegal and ineffective, but are actively producing conditions of cruelty, arbitrariness, and severe harm for people seeking safety.



Source: UNHCR  
Greece Sea arrivals  
Dashboard -  
December 2025.

## LESVOS: CONTINUED CONSTRUCTION AT VASTRIA

On Lesbos, the Greek government pressed ahead with the construction of the Vastria CCAC, despite widespread local opposition and serious environmental concerns. LCL partner, Aegean Migrant Solidarity/Community Peacemaker Teams published the report, [\*How to Build a Detention Centre: the case of Vastria in Lesbos\*](#), which examines the development of the Vastria camp in Lesbos as a symbol of a broader Greek and European shift toward isolated, highly controlled detention infrastructures for people on the move. Vastria, located in the centre of a fire-prone pine forest far from Mytilene, is designed for strict surveillance and restricted access, and its construction has advanced through a series of legislative and administrative adjustments despite widespread local opposition, repeated legal challenges (including annulment of permits over environmental impact assessment failures), and concerns about procedural violations, environmental harm and the erosion of civic oversight, reflecting a political strategy to entrench a model of migration control prioritizing containment over humanitarian protection.



Local opposition to Vastria's construction and operation continued over the last six months, with local authorities [coming together](#) to form common positions, such as the refusal of the local water authority to approve a desalination plant on the island in order to provide water to the camp. This was followed by reports in August of government coercion and [blackmail of the local water authority](#), and an amendment added at the last minute to the September Deportation law (detailed below in [Legal Updates](#)), which [allows the Ministry of Migration to override local decisions](#) on water use for camps, demonstrating that Vastria continues to be a point of contention at the local and national level.

## DETENTION AND DEGRADING CONDITIONS IN LESVOS

### Detention of Asylum Seekers In Lesbos CCAC and Containment on Lesbos Island

In Lesbos current CCAC in Kara Tepe, [a new camp director](#) was appointed in July 2025 amid continued restrictions on movement and access. During the last several months in 2025, newly arrived asylum seekers were detained inside the CCAC until completion of the registration and identification procedure, on average of about five days. During this time, asylum seekers cannot leave the camp, restricting them to the inadequate conditions described below.

The amount of time it takes to complete the registration procedure depends on a number of factors, including the number of arrivals, but also the language spoken. For example, recently, arrivals who speak languages for which there are no regular interpreters (such as Tigrinya) are detained for longer. Of note, new arrivals are detained until after the initial medical and vulnerability assessment is conducted, which was not the practice in the past. This means that if there is a back-log and delay in having a medical assessment - as is often the case given the severe medical gaps in the IOM run Hippocrates program - people are detained for longer.

In the last several months the LCL has also received reports from asylum seekers who are detained after they receive a rejection decision on their asylum claim. Although they have the right to appeal, we have received reports of several people whose movement out of the camp is unlawfully restricted. Once they appeal the rejection, they are once again allowed to leave the camp, however, the arbitrary detention in the interim has a severe impact, for example on their ability to seek legal aid for representation on appeal.

Additionally, authorities continue the practice of detaining unaccompanied children in the "Safe Zone" of the camp, when accommodation outside is not available on the island for children, instead of transferring them to mainland Greece, or providing alternative housing. In

June of 2025, the European Court of Human Rights [condemned Greece](#) for its inhuman and degrading treatment of migrant children in Greece's migrant camps and detention centres.

Meanwhile, the containment regime on the island remained intact. People continued to be arrested for attempting to leave Lesvos to mainland Greece with [forged documents](#), underscoring the **internal border within the EU** still enforced since the 2016 EU-Turkey Deal.

## Inhuman and Degrading Treatment Documented in Lesvos CCAC

In July, the Legal Centre Lesvos hosted a visit from the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation and members of German parliament. [They found that](#) residents face **severe limitations in basic services** including frequent electricity outages, poor access to hygiene and

**Διημερίδα**  
**2015-2025 Η Λέσβος του Εγκλεισμού**  
**και της Αλληλεγγύης**  
**Two-day Conference**  
**2015-2025: Lesvos of Confinement and Solidarity**

**Τετάρτη-Wednesday 10/12**  
6:00 μ.μ. - 9:00 μ.μ.  
Κτίριο Τμήματος Ωκεανογραφίας και  
Θαλασσίων Βιοεπιστημών  
Αίθουσα Γ  
στα Ελληνικά

Όλγα Λαφαζάνη, Μεταδιδακτορική  
Ερευνήτρια  
Humboldt University of Berlin  
**Follow the Money: Αναστοχασμός της**  
**"προσφυγικής κρίσης" μέσα από τις**  
**Ευρωπαϊκές χρηματοδοτήσεις"**

Χάρης Τσαβδρόγλου, Μεταδιδακτορικός  
Ερευνήτης, Πανεπιστήμιο Άμστερνταμ  
**Πολιτικές μεταδημοκρατίας και**  
**υποπολιτικές αλληλεγγύης**

Κωνσταντίνος Ζαφείρης,  
Διδάσκων Τμήματος Κοινωνιολογίας  
Πανεπιστήμιο Αιγαίου  
**Ανοιγοντας Ρωγμές Αντίστασης σε**  
**καθεστώςτα εξωτερικοποιημένων**  
**συνόρων.**

**Πέμπτη-Thursday 11/12**  
6:00 μ.μ. - 9:00 μ.μ.  
Κτίριο Τμήματος Περιβάλλοντος  
Αίθουσα Β  
in English  
Department of Environment Building Lecture Hall B

Spyros Galinos, Advocacy Coordinator  
CPT-Aegean Migrant Solidarity  
**The history of detention centers in**  
**Lesvos**

Joana Blau Vilagrasa Pallares, Lesvos  
Project Manager  
Collective Aid

Leila Bar Bari, Community Outreach  
Coordinator  
Legal Centre Lesvos  
**No camps, No prisons, No Vastria**

Lorraine Leete, Advocacy Coordinator  
Legal Centre Lesvos  
**From the EU-Turkey Deal to the**  
**Migration Pact: How Europe Is**  
**Dismantling Migrant Rights**

Εργαστήριο Συλλογικών Δράσεων και Κοινωνικών Καμπάνιων  
**LCAS<sup>TM</sup>**  
Ερευνητική ομάδα Αόρατες Πόλεις του Εργαστηρίου Αστικής  
Γεωγραφίας Πανεπιστημίου Αιγαίου

Poster for the 10-11 December 2025 event, "Lesvos of Confinement and Solidarity" at the University of the Aegean.

healthcare (with only one doctor for over a thousand people), and inadequate shelter exposed to extreme heat without shade. Although formally free to enter and leave, the strict control and punitive policies limit autonomy, and conditions inside remain far from humane, with refugees often waiting in long queues for food and water, which is distributed only once a day.

On Tuesday, **29 July**, a fire occurred in the camp, resulting in the destruction of at least three “Relief Housing Units” (RHUs). There have been no reported cases of physical injury; however, several people reported to the LCL that the incident has caused significant trauma and distress among residents. Affected individuals lost their tents and personal belongings and have moved to other tents, in overcrowded and inadequate conditions.

### Asylum Granted, but Integration Support Denied

As has been the case for over a year, once people receive asylum, they are pressured to leave the camp within 30 days, despite the lack of any government assistance or integration programs. While the EU funded HELIOS program is designed to provide housing and other integration services to vulnerable recognised refugees, until now, while this program is supposed to be implemented on the island with staff recruited and hired for this purpose months ago, **no material assistance has actually been provided to recognised refugees.**

## BORDER VIOLENCE, CRIMINALISATION AND RESISTANCE

Pushbacks and violent attacks against migrants in the Aegean continued systematically, as evidenced by multiple documented incidents, including the [21 July pushback](#) near Samos and the [25 September case](#) of a 12-year-old Afghan boy found alone in a life raft by Turkish authorities. Moreover, on [18 October](#), a shipwreck was caused by the Greek Coast Guard while attempting to stop a boat from reaching Farmakonisi, **resulting in the death of a pregnant woman.** Just a few days later, on [25 October](#), a boat carrying 34 people – 11 of them young children – was stopped by a Greek Coast Guard vessel near Chios. According to the Aegean Boat Report, masked men threatened the passengers at gunpoint, beat several of them, and threw the engine of the migrant boat into the sea before towing the boat back towards Turkey.



Photo: Turkish Coast Guard Command, “1 Irregular Migrant (Child) Was Rescued Off the Coast of Aydın,” 26.09.2025.



*Mapping Fatal Border Crossings: July - December 2025.*

This period was among the deadliest in the Aegean: at least [four people died off Lesbos](#) on 14 July, [four in Turkish waters](#) on 18 August, and [five following a “collision”](#) with a Turkish Coast Guard vessel on 9 September. In October alone, as reported by [Doctors Without Borders](#) and [UNHCR](#), 26 people were reported dead or missing, including 14 people who died in a [shipwreck on 24 October](#) off the coast of Turkey. December also saw a high number of fatalities, with 23 dead or missing in total, 18 of which occurred in a [shipwreck off Crete](#) on December 6.

[Further details on each fatal incident can be found here.](#)

Beyond shipwrecks, pushbacks, and fatalities at sea, Greek authorities continue to criminalise migration

through the systematic use of smuggling charges against people on the move, particularly those accused of steering boats or merely surviving dangerous crossings.

According to [PICUM](#), 84% of individuals prosecuted for irregular border crossing are charged on the basis that they allegedly piloted a vessel or vehicle across the border, or provided presumed assistance in managing passengers on board. This practice is reflected in a series of arrests in Lesbos over the last period. For example, on [1 September](#) two foreigners were arrested in Mytilene and charged with smuggling, accused of driving the boat from Turkey. Often those arrested and charged are brought to court and ordered detained in pre-trial detention before they have the chance to seek legal assistance. See the section below, [Combating Criminalisation of Migration](#), for more information on LCL’s work defending accused migrants.

## Increased Funding for Continued Border Violence

In parallel with continued border violence, the Greek state continues to expand its border infrastructure: [333 million euros](#) were allocated in August for 18 new Hellenic Coast Guard vessels, and in September, new high-speed patrol boats - [90% co-financed by Frontex](#) - were deployed to Aegean islands. US-made [surveillance drones](#) were also stationed on Lesbos and Rhodes. At the same time, Greek ministers reaffirmed plans to strengthen the [Evros border fence](#) and expand surveillance, while denying accountability for pushbacks.

Symbolically, during “Naval Week,” the [Coast Guard’s vessel Gavdos was opened to the public](#) in Mytilene, a public relations effort **demonstrating both the complete impunity enjoyed by the Coast Guard, and local acceptance, wilful ignorance, or at best impotence in the face of the systemic violence carried out by the Coast Guard against migrants.**

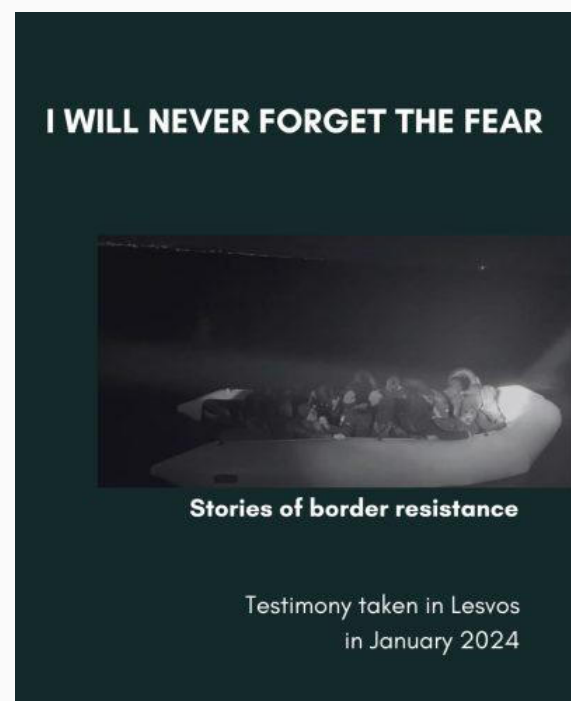
Outside of Lesbos, police violence also continued with impunity: on [29 September](#), a detainee was found dead - apparently by suicide - in police custody at Athens’ GADA headquarters. Only a week later, a **Palestinian detainee arrested during demonstrations marking two years of the ongoing genocide in Palestine** was [reportedly tortured](#) and beaten in the same police station, sustaining a broken leg. These incidents highlight the pervasive culture of violence and impunity within Greek law enforcement and the broader pattern of criminalizing solidarity and dissent.

## Prosecution Against the Coast Guard for the State Crime Of Pylos

In the face of these entrenched policies resistance efforts continue. After nearly two years of joint legal advocacy by a coalition of lawyers including LCL, [21 Hellenic Coast Guard officers are facing criminal charges for the state crime of Pylos](#), in an historic step towards accountability. The prosecution of the highest ranking officers came after an appeal filed by the coalition of lawyers, and following [revelations of systemic failures](#) by the state and evidence that Coast Guard officers “followed orders” from higher lever commanders during the non-rescue and eventual towing of the Adriana, a towing which likely causing it to capsize. In more positive news, in December, one of the “Pylos 9”, who we have represented since 2023, **was finally granted refugee status** - two and a half years after surviving the Pylos massacre and being wrongfully accused, setting an important precedent for other survivors. [Read more on our work seeking Justice for Pylos here.](#)

## Stories of Border Resistance

The Legal Centre Lesbos, together with Fitalia, also continues to [document and publish](#) the testimonies of people on the move who have survived border violence, with the intention to show that behind every statistic, there is a person risking their life to reach Europe. While these stories highlight the brutality and violence of Greek and European border policies, they are also stories of resisting border regimes, reminding us of the urgent need to continue the fight against the violence of Fortress Europe.



# LEGAL DEVELOPMENTS

## NEW DEPORTATION LAW PASSES GREEK PARLIAMENT

On 3 September 2025, the Greek Parliament [passed Law 5226/2025](#), a reform of the deportation and return framework, which expands grounds for detention and criminalisation of people on the move. The new law follows months of government rhetoric promising “[return or prison](#)” for migrants. There are several significant provisions in the new law, only a few of which will be mentioned here.

### Criminalisation of Undocumented Migrants

Significantly, the law introduces a new **criminal offence**, making “illegal stay” - previously an administrative offence - into a punishable crime carrying two to five years’ imprisonment and a minimum €5,000 fine, with no possibility of suspended sentences except in cases of where people sign for “voluntary” departure from Greece, essentially **making it a crime to be undocumented**. Additionally, re-entry to Greece after deportation or a Schengen re-entry ban is a separate crime punishable by at least **three years’ imprisonment and a €10,000 fine**.

Although exemptions exist for asylum seekers, trafficking survivors, and certain victims of crime, **the law’s structure makes criminalisation the default pathway for those denied asylum who are unable to leave Greece within the narrow timeframes imposed after negative asylum decisions**.

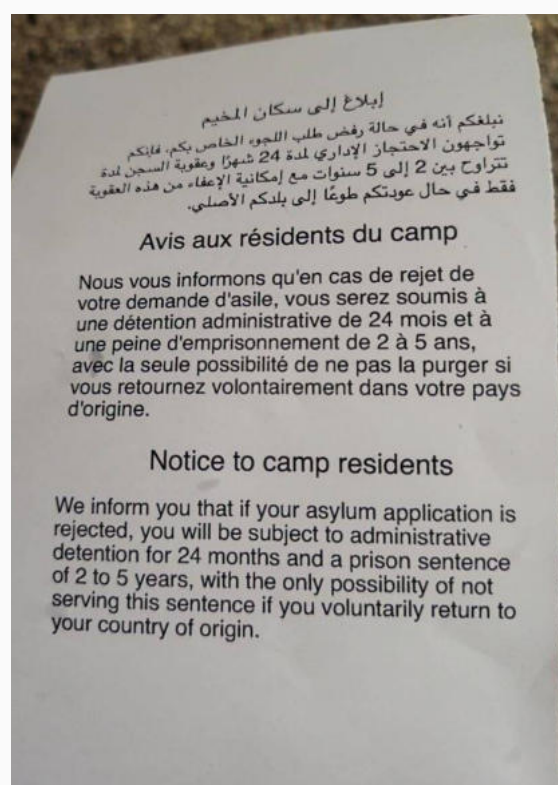


Photo shared in WhatsApp groups amongst CCAC residents.

Shortly after the law’s enactment, the Ministry of Migration [issued a circular](#), instructing authorities to immediately inform all residents of refugee camps that rejection of their asylum claim will result in up to two years administrative detention and potential prison sentences, a message followed by notices shared in group chats of migrants living in camps around Greece, spreading fear and confusion among camp residents (although the origins of the photo shared is unclear). This circular also [stated that](#) residents of refugee camps should be informed that their asylum cases would be immediately **rejected in cases of violent conduct within reception facilities**, despite the Asylum Code (Law 4939/2022) stipulating that refugee status may only be denied following a final conviction for a particularly serious crime. The circular also encourages voluntary return prior to the submission of an asylum application.

## Removal of pathways for legalisation for undocumented migrants

The new deportation law further abolishes nearly all existing regularisation pathways for undocumented people in Greece, including the residence permit given after seven-years living in Greece (under Article 134, paragraph 5 of Law 5038/2023) and a residence permit given after three-years living in Greece for people with work contracts (Article 193 of the same law). For thousands of migrants moving to Greece from countries with low recognition rates for asylum, these provisions provided the only means of obtaining legal status, and the abolishment of these pathways towards legalisation will contribute to further marginalisation and exploitation. In 2024 alone, over 46,000 people applied for legal status based on seven years residency in Greece, and 43,000 people had applied for residency based on three years residency in Greece, according to data obtained by the [Mediterranean Migration & Asylum Policy Hub](#). Further provisions in the new law include significantly **increasing the fee to submit a third asylum application from 100 to 300 Euros** per application, placing further obstacles for people to legalise their status through a new asylum application.

## Expanded administrative detention grounds

Additionally, the new law **extends the maximum administrative detention migrants from 18 to 24 months** and significantly reduces the time for asylum seekers whose cases are rejected with a final decision to “voluntarily depart” from Greece **7–14 days** - with the possibility of electronic surveillance imposed during those days - down from the **25 days to four months** previously provided, with the police able to extend this period to a maximum of 60 days.

## Deportation to third countries

Finally, the new law provides that deportation orders can now designate **multiple countries** as points of deportation in case legal status is not granted, raising concerns that Greece could attempt to follow the lead of Israel, the USA, Italy, and the UK, of deporting (or attempting to deport) people to countries that they have no connection with.



Implementation of Law 5226/2025 has already proven chaotic: for several days in mid-September, authorities [suspended the issuance of rejection decisions](#) because there was nowhere to detain the people concerned, before resuming the practice despite the absence of adequate infrastructure. Actual detention and prosecution under the new criminal provisions seems to be arbitrarily applied. It was reported that **some individuals who had arrived on Kos island were prosecuted for illegal entry and stay, immediately upon arrival, before they had even had a chance to apply for asylum**. In Lesbos, at least one person was arrested and charged with ‘illegal stay’ immediately upon receiving a rejection decision on his asylum appeal, before he even had the chance to leave the country on his own.

LCL also represents one individual who was arrested from his tent in the Lesbos CCAC after his asylum claim was rejected on appeal, brought to the court within only a few days and before he had the chance to consult with a lawyer, and convicted of illegal stay. His prison sentence was

suspended when he appealed the conviction, however, instead of being released, he was detained on administrative (rather than criminal) grounds, as someone without legal status, and transferred to the police station in Mytilene and later Amygdaleza pre-removal detention centre in Athens.

## Additional Provisions And Updates

In addition to the new deportation law, a new [ministerial decision on age assessment was introduced](#) in August 2025, despite the lack of qualified medical personnel to meet the new requirements and the violation of international standards. Meanwhile, the asylum service began **rejecting Syrian applications**, particularly from Muslim men, marking a worrying shift in recognition policy despite ongoing conflict and persecution risks in Syria. Although Greece currently has a [71% asylum recognition rate](#) - relatively high within Europe - there are worries that there are pressures on Greece's asylum service to lower this rate, further threatening the right to asylum.

## NEW DRAFT LAW TO FURTHER LIMIT MIGRANT RIGHTS

Following the adoption in September, of the restrictive Law 5226/2025 the Ministry of Migration and Asylum submitted a [new draft law](#) on 30 December aimed at transposing Directive (EU) 2024/1233 and amending the Immigration Code and related legislation, but which in fact goes much further to erode the rights of people on the move, and those in solidarity with them. As of January 2026, the bill remains under parliamentary consideration.

Of particular note, the proposed amendments to Articles 24 and 25 of the Immigration Code further entrench the criminalisation of civil society. More than 50 organisations, including LCL, have endorsed a [Joint Civil Society Statement](#), against the cruel and unjust provisions which fail to comply with international, EU, and national legal standards. Under the proposed provisions:

- Mere membership in an organisation registered in the “NGO Registry” with the Ministry of Migration & Asylum would suffice to reclassify minor offences as felonies, punishable by up to ten years’ imprisonment and fines of up to EUR 10,000.
- The initiation of criminal proceedings alone – irrespective of conviction – may result in the removal of an organisation from the ‘NGO Registry’.

As a reminder, from 2020, all organisations working with asylum seekers and refugees in Greece are required to register with the Ministry of Migration and Asylum in this registry, despite concerns raised by civil society and EU institutions that the requirements contained in this registration could [violate freedom of association, rule of law guarantees, and the rights of migrants](#).

Furthermore, the law, if passed, will [eliminate the existing path for residency](#) for migrants who entered Greece as unaccompanied children and completed at least three years of school in Greece.

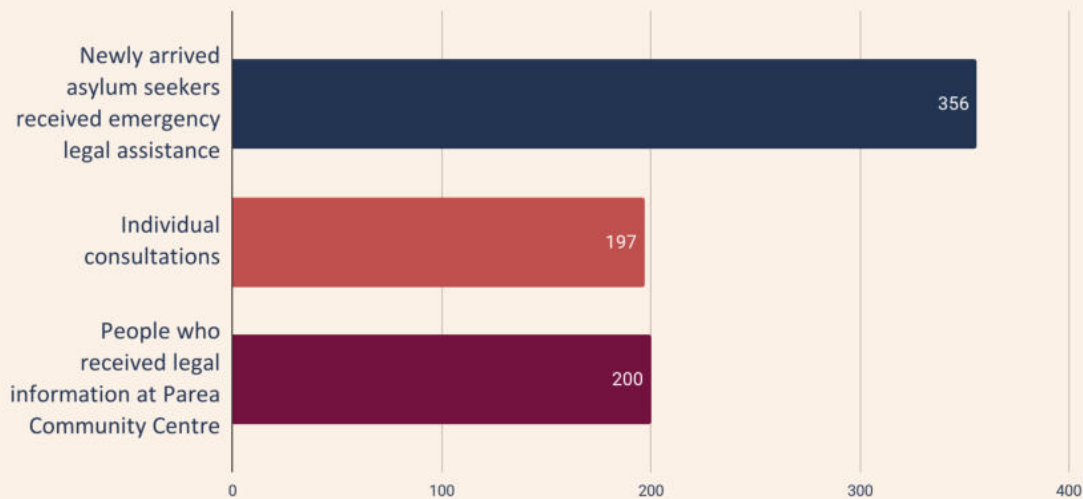
This bill does not constitute an isolated legislative initiative, but rather forms part of a broader, **systematic strategy** by the Ministry of Migration and Asylum to **criminalise migration and dismantle solidarity**. Combined with the September 2025 Deportation law, which criminalises 'illegal stay', the elimination of residency for unaccompanied children means that not only are possible pathways for legalisation being eliminated, but those who are undocumented are at risk of imprisonment if they remain in Greece without legal status.

## NEW EU RETURNS REGULATION TO EXPAND DETENTION AND DEPORTATION POWERS

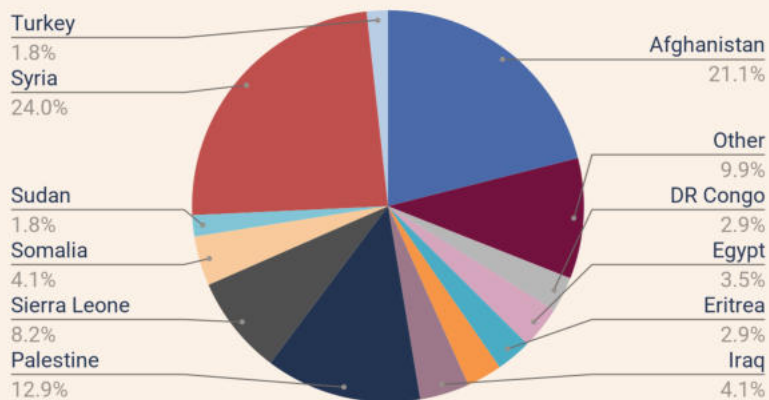
Developments are similarly bleak at the European Level. In **December 2025**, despite [opposition from more than 200 civil society organisations](#), including Legal Centre Lesvos, the Council of the European Union [agreed on a proposed EU Return Regulation](#) for the return of third-country nationals staying unlawfully in the EU. Following this decision, the European Parliament will adopt a legal framework that will **expand member states' powers to enforce returns, including through extended detention and stricter punitive deportation measures, and eroded procedural safeguards**.

# OVERVIEW OF LEGAL CENTRE LESVOS' WORK

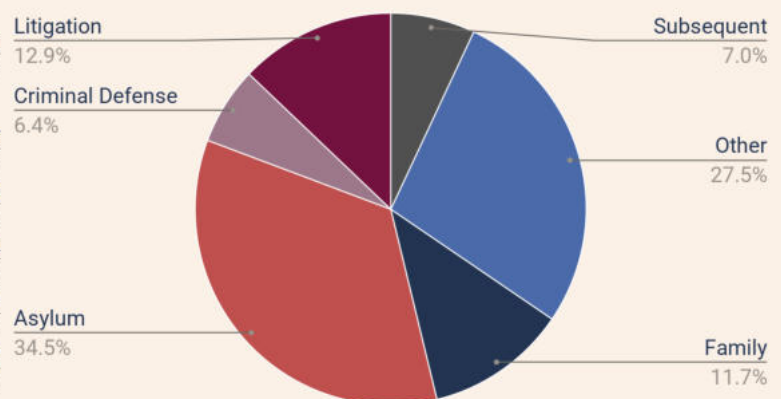
**753**  
**PEOPLE SUPPORTED**



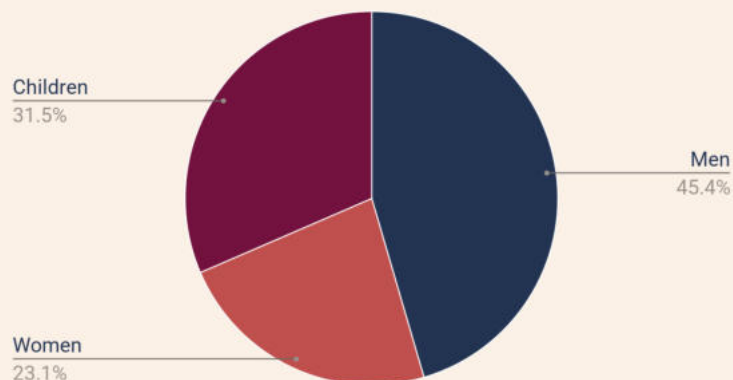
## COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN



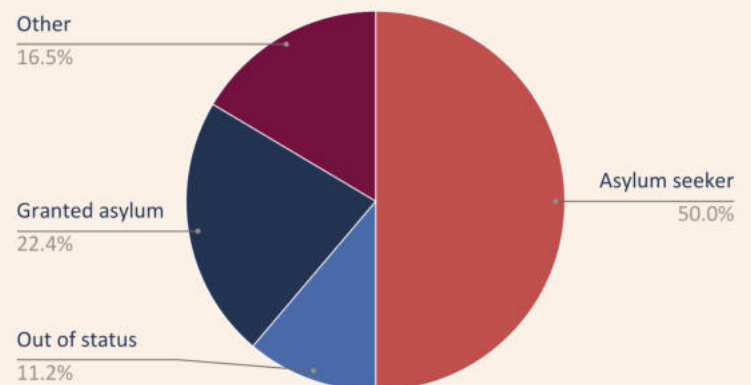
## SERVICES PROVIDED



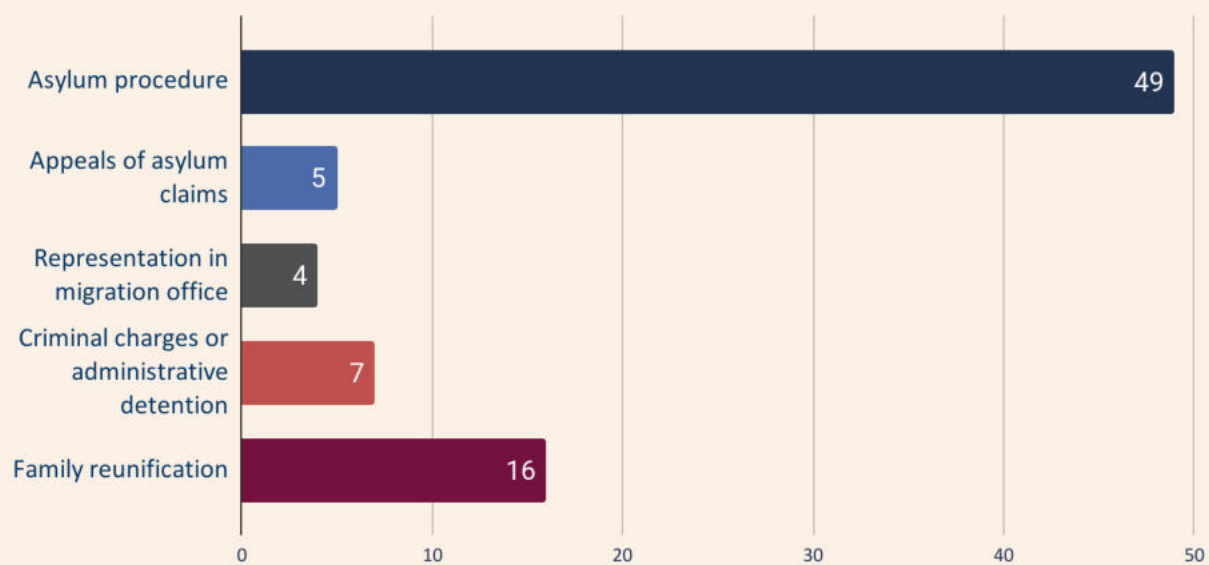
## DEMOGRAPHICS



## BENEFICIARY STATUS



## LEGAL CENTRE LESVOS' LAWYERS TOOK REPRESENTATION OF:



# COMBATTING CRIMINALISATION OF MIGRATION

Between July and December 2025, Legal Centre Lesbos (LCL), alongside partners and networks, continued its struggle against the expanding criminalization of migration under Greece's broad anti-smuggling legislation, a paradigm that targets not only people on the move but also those working in solidarity. This period was marked by critical legal victories and collective advocacy, demonstrating both the severe human consequences of these punitive policies and the importance of concerted defense efforts. Individual successes, such as compensation granted for unjust detention and acquittals reached in cases of false accusations, were exceptions in the broader landscape of systemic criminalisation. These cases, alongside the monitoring of criminal proceedings across multiple islands and the pivotal trial in the ERCI case, reveal a pattern of prosecutions built on scant evidence, disproportionate charges, and the routine erosion of fair trial rights.



*"Helping is not a Crime" Symposium attended by LCL's Natasha Dailiani in July 2025.*

## NOTABLE DEVELOPMENTS

### Compensation Granted to Acquitted Refugee

In July 2025, the Mytilene Court granted compensation to an LCL client who had been acquitted earlier in the year, recognising the harm caused by approximately six months of unjustified pre-trial detention. LCL's client had been falsely accused of facilitating the unlawful transfer of foreigners into Greece and of causing a shipwreck, simply because he had taken the helm of the boat in an attempt to save the lives of the migrants on board. He was acquitted earlier in 2025, and later granted refugee status.

### Acquittals in Shipwreck and Facilitation Cases

In [September 2025](#), LCL represented clients in two separate criminal trials before the Lesvos Court. All three were acquitted, one client being acquitted on appeal after having been convicted in the first instance. These cases, including shipwreck-related and facilitation charges in which Hellenic Coast Guard were the only witnesses, once again highlight the state's routine reliance on nonexistent or biased evidence. Especially since 2023, we have seen the Hellenic Coast Guard and police accusing migrants not only of 'facilitation' or smuggling charges related to their entry, but also many are accused of causing shipwrecks, even in cases where no shipwreck took place, or where the shipwreck was caused by the Coast Guard themselves.

### Trial Monitoring Reveals Similar Practices Across Greece

In October 2025, LCL joined the Border Violence Monitoring Network (BVMN) in monitoring the smuggling trials of migrants on Rhodes island, [documenting procedural shortcomings and patterns of criminalisation](#). These observations underscored the systemic nature of both smuggling prosecutions and the lack of effective safeguards for defendants facing these charges across Greece. On 4 December 2025, BVMN also monitored trials in Crete, where one young man was sentenced to an astonishing [1360 years in prison](#), and other defendants tried the same day were convicted with sentences ranging from 125 to 545 years imprisonment. Of note, the Crete trials took place on the same day as the "ERCI" case finally started in Lesvos, where international press and observers had gathered and filled the courtroom.

## Long Overdue Trial and Acquittal in “ERCI” Case

While the juxtaposition of attention paid to criminalised migrants as compared to criminalised humanitarian workers and human rights defenders is obvious, it was still a major and long-awaited development when the trial of the 24 accused in the [ERCI case](#) finally began before the Three-Member Felony Appeals Court of the North Aegean, on 4 December 2025. Seven years after they were first accused, the defendants were finally brought to trial on trumped up charges of establishing and participating in a criminal organisation, facilitation, and money-laundering. **The full acquittal on 15 January 2026, exposed the proceedings as a deliberate campaign of judicial harassment against civil society.** The main evidence against the 24 had been that they were in a joint WhatsApp chat that had initially been established by UNHCR to coordinate humanitarian shore-line response to migrants when they arrived in Lesvos from Turkey. It should have been obvious (as it eventually was to the court) that WhatsApp chats do not indicate criminal activity, however, it seems this was not the point. The **seven-year judicial process** in which 24 people lived under the fear of severe penalties if convicted, effectively **paralysed shoreline response and search-and-rescue operations** in Lesvos and throughout the Aegean, serving the apparent purpose of creating a chilling effect and clearing the way for the violent escalation of attacks on migrants in Greece’s coordinated pushback policy.

## New Report: No Protection from Criminalisation

In November, LCL and Human Rights Legal Project, published a new report funded by the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, [“Exemption from Criminalisation: A Safeguard or Illusion?”](#), examining the criminalisation of migration and its impact on access to the asylum procedure. Drawing on casework, trial observations and legal analysis, the report critically assesses the so-called “exemption from criminalisation” under Greek law,

demonstrating that this supposed right guaranteed in Greece and international law remains largely illusory in practice. The report was presented in Athens, together with partners from BVMN and PICUM.

