

A young boy with dark hair and a blue long-sleeved shirt is looking out from inside a tent. The tent's interior is red, and the exterior is a light-colored, wrinkled fabric. The boy's expression is serious and contemplative. The background is a solid red color on the left side of the image.

“It does not  
feel like real life”:  
*children’s everyday  
life in Greek  
refugee camps*

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October 2024

The names of children have been changed for protection reasons. All websites, if not otherwise indicated, have been accessed between 1/03/2024 and 15/10/2024.

#### **Acknowledgements**

The writers would like to thank Sappho Sakki, GCR volunteer and Mirsini Paspatis and Vassiliki Katrivanou of GCR's social service for their valuable help in this research. We would also like to thank all the NGOs, UN experts, EU Commission experts, community centers, especially the Open Cultural Center, and other professionals on the ground that either shared their valuable insights or facilitated contact of the research team with children and caregivers. Without them, this work wouldn't be possible.

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# Glossary

- 1 **AMIF (Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund):** An EU funding instrument that supports efforts to efficiently manage migration flows and implement, strengthen, and develop a common EU approach to asylum and migration.
- 2 **CAFTAAS (Controlled Access Facility for Temporary Accommodation of Asylum Seekers):** Large reception facilities on the Greek mainland providing temporary, but often long-term, accommodation for asylum seekers.
- 3 **CCAC (Closed Controlled Access Centre):** Heavily securitized camps on the Aegean islands designed to control and contain asylum seekers, often with restricted freedom of movement.
- 4 **CSO (Civil Society Organisation), also referred in the text as NGO (Non-Governmental Organisation):** an organisational structure whose members serve the general interest through a democratic process, and which plays the role of mediator between public authorities and citizens.
- 5 **EUAA (European Union Agency for Asylum):** An EU agency that provides operational and technical support to member states facing particular pressures on their asylum and reception systems.
- 6 **FRA (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights):** An EU agency that provides expertise on fundamental rights, advising EU institutions and member states.
- 7 **IOM (International Organization for Migration):** An intergovernmental organization that provides services and advice concerning migration to governments and migrants.
- 8 **IPPOKRATIS:** A new healthcare initiative in Greece aimed at improving medical and psychosocial support for asylum seekers and refugees in reception centres.
- 9 **MHPSS (Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Services):** Services designed to promote the mental health and psychosocial well-being of individuals affected by emergencies or crises.
- 10 **MoMA (Ministry of Migration and Asylum):** The Greek ministry responsible for managing migration and asylum policy and overseeing reception centres for asylum seekers.
- 11 **RIC (Reception and Identification Centre):** Facilities where asylum seekers undergo registration, identification, and initial health checks upon arrival in Greece.
- 12 **RIS (Reception and Identification Service):** A Greek government body responsible for the registration, identification, and management of asylum seekers and refugees, including running reception facilities.



# Overview of reception structures for asylum seekers in Greece



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The operational units of the Reception and Identification Service (RIS) consist of Reception and Identification Centers (RICs), Closed Controlled Access Centers (C.C.A.C.) and the Control Access Facilities Temporary Accommodation of Asylum Seekers (C.A.F.T.A.A.S.) of Northern and Southern Greece.

| Type of facility                            | Number/ location  | Operational Capacity As of 31.12.2023   | Number of children  | Role /main function - scope  | Specificities  |
|---|---|---|---|--|--|
| RECEPTION AND IDENTIFICATION CENTRES (RICS) | <p><b>8 in mainland and islands</b></p> <p><b>3 in mainland Greece:</b></p> <p>1.Fylakio RIC (Evros land border with Turkey)</p> <p>2. Within Diavata CAFTAAS (north Greece)</p> <p>3.Within Malakasa CAFTAAS (central Greece)</p> <p><b>+Plus</b> a Mobile Unit operating in Sindiki camp (north Greece)</p> <p><b>And 5 within all CACCs at the Eastern Aegean islands</b> (Lesvos, Samos, Chios, Leros, Kos)</p> <p>Source: <a href="#">MoMA</a></p> | <p>1.Fylakio RIC: 330 places</p> <p>2. Diavata: 768 RIC together with CAFTAAS places</p> <p>3. Malakasa: 3,021 RIC together with CAFTAAS places</p> <p><b>In the available places in RICs within CACCs at the Eastern Aegean islands the number of places in Pre-removal Centers is included, too except Lesvos and Chios</b></p> <p>1. Lesvos: 3,659 places</p> <p>2. Samos, 3,000 places</p> <p>3. Chios, 1,014 places</p> <p>4. Leros, 2,150 places</p> <p>5. Kos, 2,923 places</p> <p>Source: <a href="#">the Hellenic Parliament</a></p> | <p>Fluctuating, dependent on arrivals and other factors.</p> <p>According to MoMA:</p> <p>- <b>428</b> children (45% girls) were registered in Mainland RICs, <b>expect Fylakio between January –June 2024</b></p> <p>- <b>5,026</b> children (38% girls) were registered in island RICs and in Fylakio between January –June 2024</p> <p>Source: <a href="#">MoMA</a></p> <p>At the end of 2023 the general population occupancy in mainland RICs was:</p> <p>1.Fylakio RIC : 180 people</p> <p>2. Diavata: 531 people in RIC and CAFTAAS</p> <p>3. Malakasa: 2,565 people in RIC and CAFTAAS</p> <p>Source: <a href="#">the Hellenic Parliament</a></p> | <p>Third country citizens or stateless people entering Greece without the legal formalities (e.g. a visa) are to be taken by the competent police or port authorities to a RIC to go through the procedures for <b>registration, identification and verification of their data, medical screening, vulnerability assessment, provision of information</b> on rights and obligations the provision of information,</p> <p>especially for international or another form of protection and return</p> <p>procedures, as well as the temporary stay and their further referral to the appropriate reception or temporary accommodation structures</p> <p>Source: law <a href="#">4375/2016</a> (8)</p> | <p>Movement from RIC restricted for 25 days max. (can be de facto detention).</p> <p>In practice it's together with other reception facilities (CCAC or CAFTAAS), only Fylakio Evros is a standalone RIC</p> |
|   |   |   |   |  |  |

The operational units of the Reception and Identification Service (RIS) consist of Reception and Identification Centers (RICs), Closed Controlled Access Centers (C.C.A.C.) and the Control Access Facilities Temporary Accommodation of Asylum Seekers (C.A.F.T.A.A.S.) of Northern and Southern Greece.

| Type of facility  | Number/ location   | Operational Capacity As of 31.12.2023   | Number of children  | Role /main function - scope   | Specificities  |
|---|--|---|---|---|--|
| <b>CLOSED CONTROLLED ACCESS CENTRES (CCACS)</b>   | <p><b>Only in the Aegean islands</b></p> <p>5 in total:<br/>Lesvos,<br/>Samos,<br/>Chios,<br/>Leros,<br/>Kos</p> <p>Source: <a href="#">MoMA</a></p>                                       | <b>Total of 12,746 places</b>   | <p>As of 1 October 2024, 334 UACs are in CCACs, hosted in separate areas that operate as "safe zones."</p> <p>Source: MoMA</p> <p>No data on accompanied children in CCACs. The general population in all 5 CACCs at the end of 2023 was <b>16,099 people (= 3,353 more people</b> compared to the operational capacity) and <b>1,037</b> of them (children included) are entitled to <b>special reception conditions</b>.</p> <p>Source: the Hellenic Parliament</p> | The Closed Controlled Access Centers of Islands (C.C.A.C.) is the <b>first line of reception in the islands</b> ; created with the aim of providing protection and safe accommodation to third-country nationals that enter Greece without the legal requirements. Note that CCACs also host other facilities, e.g. the Samos, Kos, Leros CCACs have a Reception and Identification Centre (RIC, see above) and a pre-removal detention centre for return procedures.                                 | <p>Heavily securitized, with high fences, barbed wire, security towers and security staff. Restrictions on exit and movement.</p> <p>Limited access to health, education, CP and MPHSS services.</p> <p>Severe limits to freedom of movement. Limited and increasingly restricted access for NGOs.</p> |
| <b>CONTROLLED ACCESS FACILITY FOR TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION OF ASYLUM SEEKERS (CAFTAAS)</b> | <p><b>Only in mainland and are the focus of this policy paper</b></p> <p>24 in mainland Greece<br/>(12 in the north and 12 in the south of Greece)</p> <p>Source: <a href="#">MoMA</a></p> | <b>18,429</b> operational capacity (Diavata and Malakasa are not included, are referred to in the RIC table, see above) | <p>No data on accompanied children in CAFTAAS.</p> <p>The general population in all 24 CAFTAAS at the end of 2023 was <b>13,635 people</b> (Diavata and Malakasa are not included, see RIC table) and <b>1,764</b> of them (<b>children included</b>) are entitled to <b>special reception conditions</b></p> <p>Source: <a href="#">the Hellenic Parliament</a></p>  | <b>Second-line of reception in mainland.</b><br><br>Temporary but long-term accommodation to third-country nationals or stateless individuals who have applied for international protection within the territory of Greece. They also host the family members of applicants, children, as well as vulnerable individuals. Residents of CAFTAAS have to leave the premises when they become beneficiaries of international protection or if rejected within 30 days from the delivery these decisions. | <p>Heavily securitized, with high fences, barbed wire, security staff, checks.</p> <p>Remote - industrial type of areas, under-served by public transportation</p> <p>Open/close/change use.</p> <p>Limited access to health, education, CP and MPHSS services.</p>                                    |



# Executive *summary*



The Greek Council for Refugees (GCR) and Save the Children (SC) documented and analysed the experiences of children who have resided for months across ten mainland refugee camps with their families. This report draws upon 32 interviews with children, their caregivers (parents of children under 12), and experts, including state officials. While not representative of all children on the move in Greece, this study adds a crucial and unique perspective by **centring on the voices of children**.

In 2023, one in four applicants for international protection in Europe was a child<sup>1</sup>. Greece remains a critical entry point to Europe for children on the move. In the first six months of 2024 alone, Greece witnessed a dramatic surge in refugee and migrant child arrivals, seeing over 6,400 children, a fourfold increase compared to the same period in 2023<sup>2</sup>. Notably, 86% of these children are under the age of 15<sup>3</sup>. Most of these children endured perilous journeys, fleeing from conflict-ridden countries such as Syria, Afghanistan, and Somalia, only to face stays in restrictive, detention-like conditions in reception camps across the Aegean islands and the Greek mainland.

The Greek government's reception policy has primarily focused on restricting asylum seeking children and their families in remote camps, where conditions are poor. Despite **EU and national legal frameworks** that mandate the special protection of asylum seeker children and their families' well-being, the reality on the ground shows systemic gaps that **deprive children within families from accessing basic rights**. Many camps in Greece are remote and far from urban centres, making it a struggle to access education, play, healthcare, and psychosocial support. With no proper measures to help children integrate into Greek society, they are left vulnerable and disconnected from life outside the camps.

**"IT DOES NOT FEEL LIKE REAL LIFE":**

children's everyday life in Greek refugee camps



## Key findings

- 1. Trapped in isolation:** children's testimonies reveal a profound sense of isolation in remote camps, where remoteness - compounded by transportation hurdles - makes it difficult to reach schools, healthcare, and other basic services, fuelling anxiety, frustration, and a deep sense of exclusion.
- 2. Inadequate mental health and child protection services:** children are entitled to professional psychosocial and protection support when required. In reality such services are very scarce, leaving vulnerable children even more unprotected.
- 3. Healthcare gaps:** camps suffer from severe medical shortages, with too few healthcare staff and limited resources, leaving children without timely care. Families face long treks for treatment, where lack of interpreters, specialist help, and essential medications jeopardizes children's health.
- 4. Poor food quality and access:** camp-provided food as often expired, nutritionally inadequate, leaving many meals uneaten. Suspended cash assistance worsens the issue and cutting food aid for parents when their asylum is puts children's welfare at risk.
- 5. Poor living conditions:** mould, cockroaches, and limited sanitation facilities are a daily reality for some asylum-seeking children, falling far short of mandated standards.
- 6. Limited access to interpretation services:** severe interpreter shortages since may 2024 have left families in legal limbo, unable to effectively access the full range of asylum procedures, healthcare, or essential services. Despite temporary euaa support, protests continue as 36 ngos urge action, warning that the ongoing gaps breach greek and eu asylum laws.
- 7. Barriers to education access and integration:** despite welcome improvements, particularly regarding access, asylum-seeking children face inconsistent access to education, with delays and transport barriers often hindering enrolment. Social isolation and incidents of discrimination further impede integration, affecting children's sense of belonging.
- 8. Children's well-being in camp life:** children in camps report feeling lonely, anxious, and bored, with the camp's detention-like setup contributing to stress, hopelessness, and a sense of stalled development. Sparse child-friendly spaces and limited recreational activities exacerbate feelings of frustration. Legal uncertainty adds further stress, profoundly impacting children's mental health and sense of security.

## Recommendations

- 1. Transition to Urban Reception Models:** Replace the camp system with urban housing solutions that provide safer, more stable environments for children and families. Building on the success of the ESTIA programme, this transition must be supported by EU and national funding.
- 2. Provide Children and their families with Special Reception Conditions, as mandated in EU and Greek legislation, and implement immediate service improvements in all Camps:** Enhance access to healthcare, education, safe play and psychosocial services. Address urgent needs for reliable transportation, child-friendly spaces, and appropriate food.
- 3. Early Integration Efforts:** Prioritise integration from the moment families arrive, including immediate access to formal education and support for parents. Language classes and community engagement initiatives must be implemented to aid integration.
- 4. Child-Centric Implementation of the EU Pact:** Ensure the implementation of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum prioritises children's rights, guaranteeing dignified reception conditions and long-term integration strategies.

# Background



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Since 2015, accommodation for asylum seekers in Greece has evolved from ad-hoc, overcrowded camps to securitized facilities. **EU funding** has significantly supported this transition, but laws and policies focus heavily on **border control, deterrence and containment**, often at the expense of adequate reception conditions and fundamental rights.

Greece faced a massive reception system crisis in 2015. Hundreds of thousands of refugees and migrants sought to enter Europe through its borders. In March 2016, the Western Balkan route closure and the **EU-Türkiye Statement**<sup>4</sup> drastically changed the migration landscape. The Statement allowed Greece to return new arrivals to Türkiye. To help those left stranded in Greece due to border closures, temporary camps were set up on the mainland<sup>5</sup>. Until March 2020, Site Management Support oversaw the camps<sup>6</sup>.

In 2020 the camps were designated 'temporary accommodation centres' by the government. Today they are known as **Closed Access Facility for Temporary Accommodation of Asylum Seekers**<sup>7</sup> (CAFTAAS). The International Organization for Migration (IOM) withdrew its involvement in early 2023, and the facilities are now administered by the Reception and Identification Service (RIS) of the Greek Ministry of Migration and Asylum (MoMA). Today, RIS oversees 24 mainland reception facilities housing around **16,911 refugees and asylum seekers**. Conditions at these sites vary - many camps are in remote areas with poor transport links. Camps near urban centres like Skaramangas and Eleonas closed in 2022.

**"IT DOES NOT FEEL LIKE REAL LIFE":**  
children's everyday life in Greek refugee camps



## Reception conditions for vulnerable asylum seekers

During reception and identification procedures, vulnerable asylum seekers, **including children**, are entitled to special reception conditions that ensure an adequate standard of living, safeguard their physical and mental health with respect for their dignity, and provide access to emergency healthcare and psychosocial support, among other services<sup>8</sup>. Children, unaccompanied or not, are considered vulnerable (art.1) and these conditions apply even if an asylum application has not been submitted.

The Reception and Identification Service (RIS), part the Secretariat General of Reception of Asylum Seekers of MoMA, is the authority responsible for the reception of asylum seekers. The Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund (AMIF) plays a crucial role in funding Greece's reception system<sup>9</sup>.

The Greek government contracts private companies to manage food, facilities, and security in the camps. Since the termination of the ESTIA accommodation scheme<sup>10</sup> in late 2022, state-run camps are now the **only government-provided "housing"** for asylum seekers. To qualify for financial assistance, asylum seekers must prove continuous residence in the sites<sup>11</sup>, meaning they are forced to remain there to avoid destitution. This reflects Greece's policy of confining **asylum seekers to tightly controlled, isolated facilities**, restricting their autonomy.

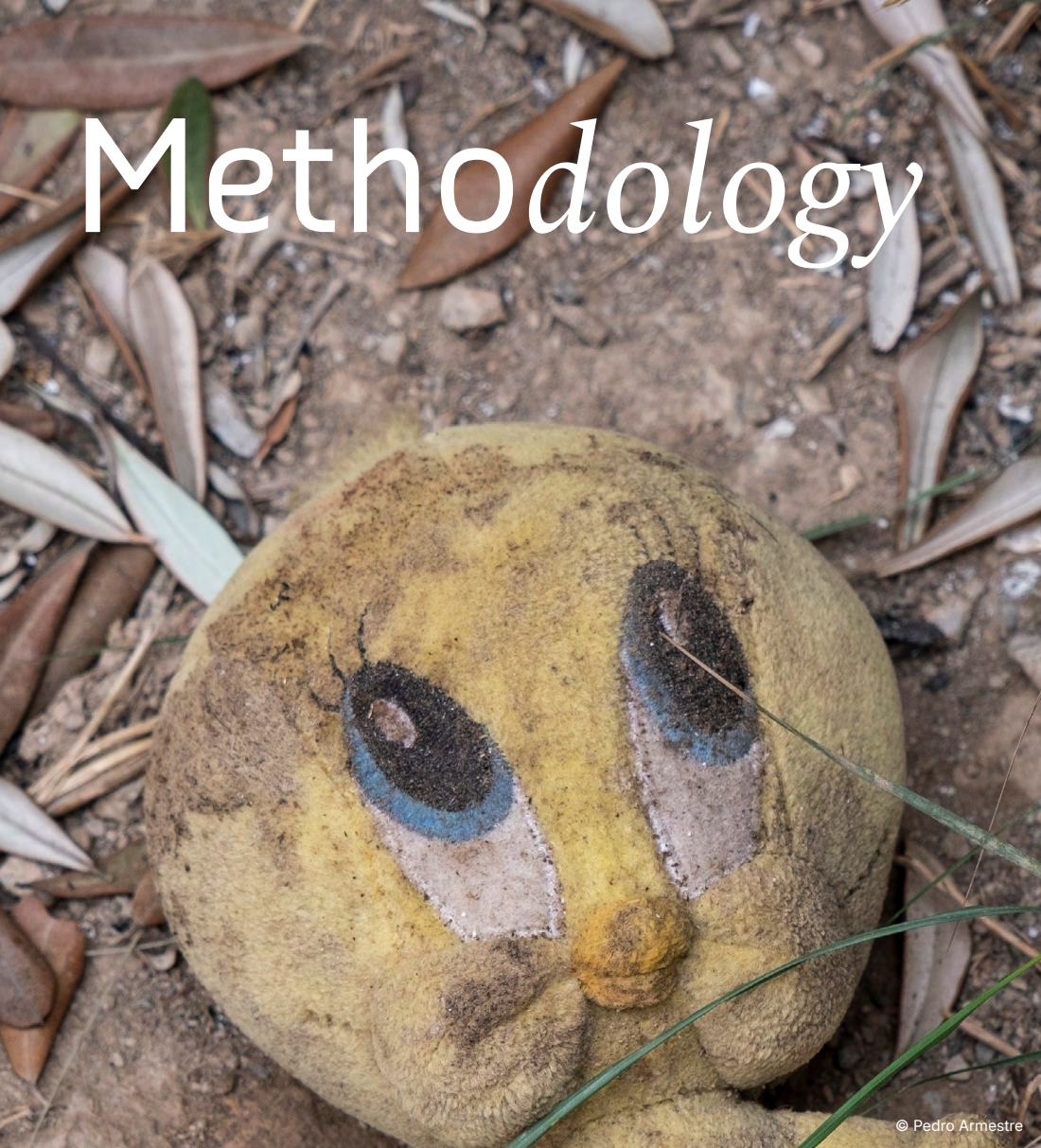
Concerns about transparency within the Greek system are growing. Access to information about people in mainland camps and limitations in service provision have got worse since the IOM stopped its Site Management Support<sup>12</sup>(SMS) and monthly **factsheets**<sup>13</sup>. With only a handful of NGOs operating within the camps and the state now fully in charge of reception services, assessing needs and planning interventions are more difficult. Despite **Joint advocacy efforts** by CSOs, there have been no substantial reforms.



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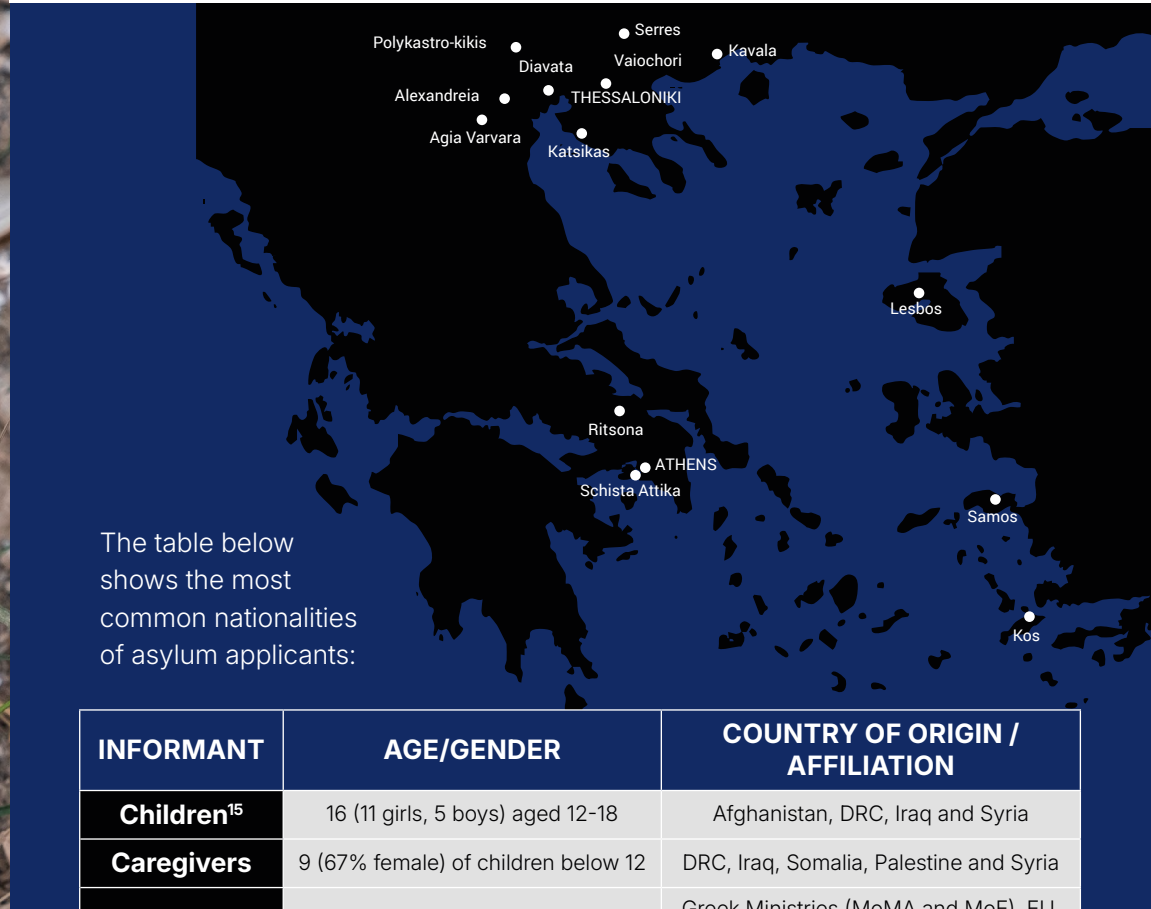


# Methodology



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Between April and July 2024, GCR and Save the Children, conducted 32 in-person and remote interviews<sup>14</sup> with children across **Northern and Southern mainland CAFTAAS** and Kos **Closed Controlled Access Centres (CCACs)**. Because many people had originally arrived via the Greek islands or the Evros region, they could talk about the conditions in the islands' CCACs and Fylakio **Reception and Identification Centre (RIC)** as well - although this was not the focus of this exercise.



The table below shows the most common nationalities of asylum applicants:

| INFORMANT                    | AGE/GENDER                          | COUNTRY OF ORIGIN / AFFILIATION                              |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Children<sup>15</sup></b> | 16 (11 girls, 5 boys) aged 12-18    | Afghanistan, DRC, Iraq and Syria                             |
| <b>Caregivers</b>            | 9 (67% female) of children below 12 | DRC, Iraq, Somalia, Palestine and Syria                      |
| <b>Experts</b>               | 9                                   | Greek Ministries (MoMA and MoE), EU, UNHCR, UNICEF and NGOs. |

Though interviews included residents from 10 different CAFTAAS, the findings are not statistically representative of all mainland facilities in Greece<sup>16</sup>. However, the diversity of camps—covering both Northern (62%) and Southern Greece - provides a solid basis to identify common themes in daily camp life. Most research to date has focused on adults, leaving the experiences of accompanied children in long-term mainland camps largely unexamined. This research builds on a series of recent reports by the Greek Ombudsperson and various peer organisations.<sup>17</sup>

Data collection at the sites was challenging due to a lack of publicly available data on camps' staffing, population, etc. and MoMA officials' reluctance to participate and share information. While GCR's established presence eased some barriers, children, caregivers, and officials were often hesitant or afraid to openly discuss camp conditions. The camps' remoteness, poor transport connections, and suspended cash assistance further complicated access to child residents for this research.

# Children's experiences on the way to Greece



We didn't leave our country for a better future, we left because of death and war"

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## Profile and Experiences of Asylum-Seeking Children in Greece

Asylum-seeking children in Greece originate mainly from Syria (28%), Afghanistan (20%), Egypt (10%), Turkey, Palestine, Pakistan, and Iraq. **MoMA** recorded 11,730 child asylum applications during the first nine months of 2024, with 2,480 of these being unaccompanied minors and 9,250 accompanying families. **The majority of these children (7,429) are under 13.**

Many of the children have spent months or years in Türkiye. Caregivers described worsening conditions there. One single mother of three left after 10 years due to rising racism and deteriorating safety. Others echoed similar fears, desiring peace, safety, and education for their children, with one saying, **"I don't want my children to go through that again."** (P6&7). The looming threat of forced deportation from Türkiyeprompted many Syrians to take the perilous sea crossing to Greece in search of refuge.

Precise public data on the specific number of asylum-seeking and refugee children in the CAFTAAS, disaggregated by age, gender, and special needs, remains unavailable (see below).

Children's and caregivers' accounts reveal the extreme hardships of their journeys to Greece. Many experienced perilous conditions with some falling out of overcrowded boats into the sea: **"I fell in the sea. We were too many people in a boat, it was open and raining"** (CH5). Children also recounted gruelling treks across treacherous mountains with one saying: **"I fell off a horse because it was snowing... we couldn't walk, we were stuck in the snow."** (CH13). Some mothers spent days hiding in forests in Türkiye before crossing: **"My 4-year-old daughter and Isat in the forest for five days without food, without water, without anything"** (P2). These accounts underscore the desperation and fear that drives families to take on such dangerous journeys. As one parent powerfully stated, **"We didn't leave our country for a better future, we left because of death and war"** (P6&7).

These journeys leave children and caregivers deeply scarred, with particular deep suffering

amongst younger, less resilient children: **"From Iran to Türkiye to Greece, it was so difficult for us but we are bigger, we can understand; but for my younger brother, I think he can't take it"** (CH9)<sup>18</sup>. A child who fled from Afghanistan to Iran, Türkiye, and eventually Greece expressed a deep sense of rejection: **"We never had documents, and we were always scared, no country wants us."** (CH8). This statement captures the profound insecurity and fear felt by displaced children without legal status.

A large proportion of children endure violence on their journeys, often at the hands of border officials and smugglers. Nearly **one in five children** arriving in Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta and Spain reported experiencing physical abuse<sup>19</sup>. Many children coming through the Balkan Route are threatened, blackmailed, humiliated or insulted<sup>20</sup>. Pushbacks by both Greek and Turkish authorities as well as mistreatment by smugglers, are common.<sup>21</sup>





## Children at risk: systematic pushbacks in Greece

Systematic and well-documented pushbacks in Greece are an issue. Migrants and asylum seekers are frequently intercepted at the border and forcibly returned to where they came from (usually Türkiye) without proper assessment of their protection needs or access to asylum procedures<sup>22</sup>. Moreover<sup>23</sup>, mounting evidence suggests “pushbacks”, **including cases of abduction and deportation**, of individuals on Greek territory well within the border<sup>24</sup>. In some cases<sup>25</sup> people have been coerced onto life rafts and abandoned to drift back into Turkish waters.

Between March 2022 and October 2024 GCR has filed 85 applications for interim measures under Rule 39 before the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), for people seeking humanitarian assistance and access to asylum procedures. All have been granted, yet allegations of people being forcibly returned or going missing persist, showing the ongoing danger for asylum-seeking children in Greek borders<sup>26</sup>.

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## Case study: Samuel's story

\***Samuel**, a 13-year-old from Congo, has been living with his mother and 8-year-old brother in Ritsona camp for nine months, after stays in Rhodes and Kos.

Samuel's journey to Greece was fraught with danger and fear. His family fled Congo to Türkiye where they stayed for six months, and Samuel was denied schooling. They were detained by Turkish police who: **"came and arrested all Africans. If you didn't have papers they put you in prison. For three months I stayed in prison with my family"**.

Without any regularisation prospects and fearing further detention, they tried to cross to Greece multiple times but were repeatedly intercepted. **"The Greek policemen were very tall and beat women. They beat people in the water, in the sea. They don't care if you are a child, they beat you in the sea, take your boat, make a hole and leave you there in the sea. They did that also to us. One by one they took us out of the boat, beat us and threw us back into the sea. They told us to switch off the engine and if we die, they don't care. They took all our stuff, the phones, the clothes, the money."**

They finally managed to reach Greece: **"I feel strong that I went through all these hardships. We were in the forest six days and then we were in the middle of the sea two days, we survived, without water, without food, without house, without nothing. When I was sleeping, they woke me up because they said it's not good to sleep."**

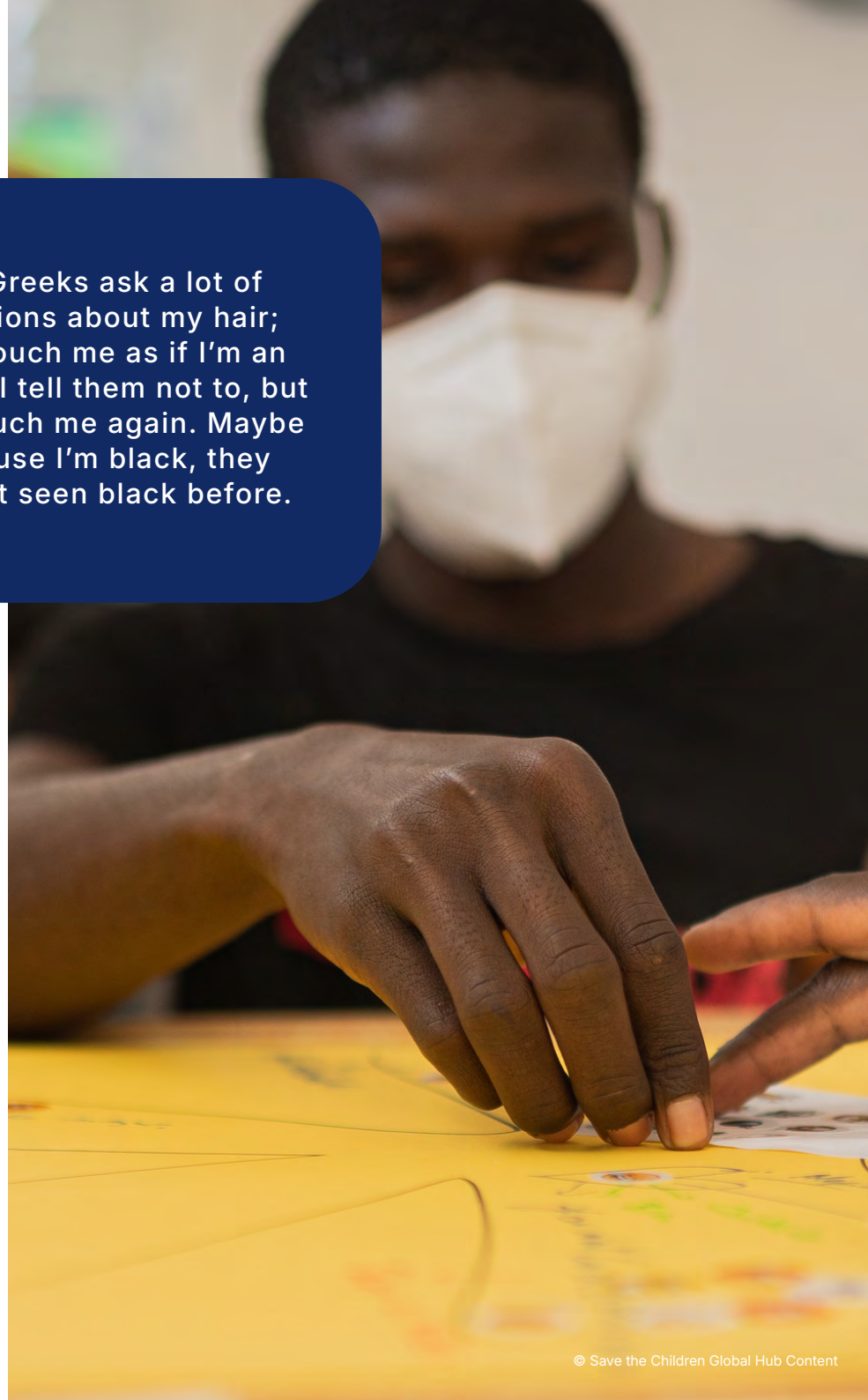
Life in Ritsona camp is tough. Camp security is ineffective and older residents can be violent: **"When they feel you've done something, they come with knives, very big knives, with their friends and they beat you."** On one occasion, residents of the camp attacked Samuel and his friend: **"They threw rocks at us, then came to our house... We stayed inside for a week because we were scared"**. If Samuel was in charge, he says he would make the camp safer by confiscating knives and banning alcohol.

Samuel is in sixth grade in school. He has mixed feelings about it: **"I don't like school very much because I'm bored"** but he enjoys subjects like gymnastics, painting, and history, and says his teacher is "very good." Samuel has made a few friends but says that **"the Greeks ask a lot of questions about my hair; they touch me as if I'm an animal. I tell them not to, but they touch me again. Maybe because I'm black, they haven't seen black before"**.

He loves playing football, often playing with his friends, but this is not possible at the camp: **"We don't play football here because we might fall: there is dirt in the ground, no grass"**. Football offers a rare opportunity to connect with children from the outside world. Samuel recalls with pride a game in Avlona where, for a brief moment, he felt a sense of belonging as Greek kids cheered his skills: **"After the game, all the kids in the school knew my name because I was so good."**



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## II. Trapped in isolation: *Children's accounts of life in remote refugee camps*

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### “Our children are in ‘constant lockdown’”<sup>27</sup>

Children can spend weeks, months, or even years in CAFTAAS, depending on factors such as the volume of arrivals in Greece and procedural challenges. Their testimonies reveal a widespread sense of physical and psychological restriction, likening the camps to detention facilities. Although leaving the camp is permitted for children and caregivers, it is tightly regulated, with ID card and fingerprint checks, reinforcing the institution-like atmosphere and causing severe stress (see Part V). The EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), for example, states in its [12 Points for Reception](#): ‘children should never be exposed to a prison-like environment with barbed wire fencing’<sup>28</sup>.

### “We feel isolated like we are in the desert”<sup>29</sup>

The geographical isolation of most CAFTAAS makes life harder for children and caregivers. For example, Ritsona camp, where some interviewees live, is located 75 km from Athens, with the closest bus stop 10 km away and the nearest hospital 18 km away<sup>30</sup>. Children often complained about distance to towns, with one saying they are even **‘too far away from the houses’**(CH6). This isolation prevents children from participating in activities, hampering integration and social interaction outside the camp.

The RIS is responsible for providing transportation to residents of mainland refugee camps<sup>31</sup>. However, services are unreliable due to funding issues that often interfere with the renewal of contracts with transport providers<sup>32</sup>. When buses do operate, priority is given to medical needs and asylum service appointments, leaving little room for everyday necessities. If the camp is served by a bus line, children’s lives are tied to around a limited and inefficient service, severely restricting their mobility. Some children and caregivers mentioned that their isolation is made worse by



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**Member states are expected to ‘ensure effective geographic access to relevant services, such as public services, school, health care, social and legal assistance, a shop for daily needs, laundry and leisure activities’, EUAA guidance on reception conditions.**



not having the money to pay for transport, a problem deepened by the suspension of cash assistance at the time of the interviews.

RIS said that lack of transport forced children and their parents to **walk long distances on dangerous roads—sometimes in extreme weather** - to reach the nearest bus stop.<sup>33</sup> In Vagiochori, officials reported that even after a 5 km walk, residents have only a 60% chance of a place on the bus because buses are full, they don't show up, or drivers refuse to take passengers from the camp(KII7).

This combination of isolation and restriction of movement severely hinders caregivers' attendance at essential appointments, such as asylum-related interviews, potentially jeopardising their cases<sup>34</sup>. It also makes it difficult for children to go to school, and to healthcare and social support appointments. A 2021-22 survey co-conducted by GCR showed that 50% of mainland camp residents faced difficulty accessing essential services and 60% reported no opportunities to engage with Greek society due to isolation<sup>35</sup>. These concerns were raised by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees during his visit to Greece in February 2024<sup>36</sup>. UNHCR, UNICEF and IOM have long emphasised unsuitability of these remote, under-serviced camps for long-term living<sup>37</sup>.

In addition, many of these camps fall short of the reception standards defined by the European Union Agency for Asylum<sup>38</sup>, which indicate that facilities should be within a reasonable walking distance of relevant services, ideally no more than 3 km to public services and 2 km to healthcare facilities and schools, with safe walking infrastructure (Indicator 1.2(b)).







# III. Children's special *reception rights unmet*

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**This section focuses on just some of the many essential services that children and their families need access to both within and outside the camps.**





# “We brought you here to give You food and accommodation, don’t ask for anything else”<sup>39</sup>

## Lack of child protection professionals in camps

Nearly all children interviewed did not know for sure where to get help if they felt unsafe in their camps, with only one recalling an information poster on reporting mistreatment.

Since site management transferred from IOM to MoMA in early 2023, NGOs, UN agencies, and the EU Commission have raised concerns about the decline in child protection services<sup>40</sup>, including case management and psychosocial support. These services are vital for the safety and well-being of children and their families who are at heightened risk of violence, abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and other forms of harm.

A RIS employee explained that cooperation between a child protection officer from the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) and a psychologist from the National Public Health Organisation (EODY), (K117) had ended,

leaving a major gap. Referrals to external child protection services is difficult and urgent cases often go unaddressed. Similarly, camps suffer a shortage of specialists: **“When you don’t have specialised professionals in the camps, you are gambling with people’s fate”** (K117) said a RIS employee. While RIS staff and the EUAA<sup>41</sup> are officially responsible for case management<sup>42</sup>, including of vulnerable cases<sup>43</sup>, key informants noted that EUAA experts are not currently involved.

Making a bad situation worse is the absence of standard operating procedures (SOPs) for referrals, leaving many cases unidentified and unresolved. A UNICEF expert remarked, **“you must ensure that in a facility with two hundred people, there are enough social workers, psychologists, and other professionals, so that it is not a service that operates at the level of ‘I record the problem and cannot respond’”.** (K111).



When you don’t have specialised professionals in the camps, you are gambling with people’s fate



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### **Failure to uphold children's right to mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS)**

Most children interviewed reported inconsistent or non-existent access to mental health professionalism the camps, violating their right to adequate care. A 17-year-old Afghan boy described the psychological struggles he and his mother faced after their asylum claim was rejected: *"It's actually quite difficult for us since we got rejected. We are thinking about it too much. We are facing difficulties, mostly psychologically [...]. No, we don't have [someone that I can speak for my anxiety or stress]. Even in Lesbos there was nobody"* (CH12).

In addition, EODY's mental health services are not adequately tailored for children. One NGO representative stated: *"There is an initial registration, there is an assessment of needs, but they do not take on the psychological support of a child in a targeted way"* (KI13). Furthermore, the transition between the FILOS II programme and the commencement of IPPOKRATIS<sup>44</sup> disrupted the camp's ability to provide specialised mental health staff. A RIS employee said, *"Practically, we don't have the specialised staff who can identify or diagnose such problems"* (KI17).

The inadequacy of MHPSS services available to camp residents breaches children's right to mental health and exacerbates both their short-term struggles and the long-term risks to their development and well-being<sup>45</sup>. The State's duty to care for and protect all children at risk, regardless of migratory status<sup>46</sup>, is mandated by both the Reception EU Directive and national legal frameworks, as well as by Article 24 of the

EU Charter, which stipulates that **children have the right to the protection and care necessary for their well-being**<sup>47</sup>. Furthermore, EU Member States are required to provide special protection, considering children's specific situations and needs.<sup>48</sup>

### **Limited access to interpretation services**

**“interpretation needs, especially for asylum issues, cannot be met through Google Translate. Last year, in 2023, we went three months without interpreters—not a week or a month, but three months. It was very, very difficult**

Communicational struggles are an additional and often severe problem. Camps lack permanent interpreters and are instead heavily reliant on contracts with external providers. In May 2024, Metadrasi, the main provider of interpretation services to both the Asylum Service and the RIS, suspended its services due to a nine month delay in payment by MoMA<sup>49</sup>, despite the fact that **these services are funded**

by the **AMIF (2021-2027)**<sup>50</sup>. Although the EUAA can temporarily cover gaps, the instability is constant and damaging:

*"interpretation needs, especially for asylum issues, cannot be met through Google Translate. Last year, in 2023, we went three months without interpreters—not a week or a month, but three months. It was very, very difficult"*(KI17). Protests are ongoing at the time of writing, with asylum-seeker families and children in Greek refugee camps urgently demanding interpretation services to access asylum interviews, medical care, and other essential needs. Without interpreters, families remain stranded in legal limbo for months, unable to leave the camps or move forward in rebuilding their lives. In an **open letter to the Ministry of Migration and Asylum** on November 1st, 36 NGOs criticized the ongoing disruption of interpretation services, stating that *"no concrete measures towards reinstating a functional interpretation system in Greek asylum procedures seem to have been put in place."* This breakdown violates both Greek and European asylum law, which mandate that asylum seekers must be able to conduct interviews in a language they understand—an area in which Greece has previously faced legal challenges in European courts due to inadequate interpretation services<sup>51</sup>.



# B

**“There is a doctor, but he doesn’t do anything, he doesn’t care. ‘Give him water, lay down’. Better not go there at all”<sup>52</sup>**

Too few medical personnel and an inadequate healthcare infrastructure leave residents exposed to physical and mental health problems<sup>53</sup>. For example, in the Serres and Polykastro CAFTAAS, there are approximately 200 residents per healthcare staff member. In Ritsona, the ratio is 255 residents per staff member<sup>54</sup>.

All children and parents spoke about this. In many camps, children reported doctors being only available part-time, if at all: **“After 14:00 there is no doctor, only a nurse (...) we had to call an ambulance” (CH9)**. The case of a child in Ritsona showed how care falls short: **“It’s very difficult to go out and see a doctor. I had surgery, and it was very difficult to make an appointment. It took us around three years to get a doctor appointment. My legs, if you notice, are curved, they are not straight” (CH6)**. Many children and caregivers said that the camp medical units consistently referred them to public hospitals without providing any additional support. As one child from Serres explained, **“There is not much healthcare. Whatever you have, they ask you to visit the hospital. The difficult part is getting there—you have to pay for a taxi or bus. Walking takes one or two hours; by car it’s 15-20 minutes.” (CH12)**.

**Medications** beyond basic pain relief are scarce. For **specialised care**, the challenges are even greater. A single mother caring for a child with autism explained how the support her child needed was unavailable: **“Terre des Hommes helped us a lot, especially with the hospital and so on. But now that they left, it is complicated – I had to start over from scratch and I feel a bit stuck, not knowing where to go.” (P1)**.

Changes in asylum status can leave children without crucial health support, such as being denied vaccinations. One caregiver in Diavata recounted: **“In the doctor’s office they are very good, they help us, they have three interpreters. But the time they didn’t help us was when we got a refusal, they told us they couldn’t help us because we didn’t have papers; our child, all he needed was to get a vaccine to get into school, they didn’t do it because he didn’t have papers. And unfortunately, until now he hasn’t done it” (P2)**.

The dedicated and eagerly anticipated medical care plan, Ippokratis, a partnership between IOM and a private company, began in February 2024.<sup>55</sup> By September 2024, medical and psychosocial teams were getting down to work in several camps. Experts are cautiously

optimistic but point out that the services provided will not be at the same level as those previously offered by the Site Management Support (SMS). Despite this, progress has been made, with availability of psychosocial support and improved provision of medicine.

Access to medical support outside the camp is problematic. On top of the accessibility issues, long waiting times and insufficient paediatric care, public hospitals<sup>56</sup> do not have interpretation services and this obstructs communication between asylum seeking children and caregivers and medical staff<sup>57</sup>.

“

**After 14:00 there is no doctor, only a nurse (...) we had to call an ambulance**



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## "If I eat this food, you will see what I have the next day"<sup>64</sup>

In the CAFTAAS, food is distributed via catering services managed by the RIS and **funded by AMIF**. Quality checks are required (Ibid.), **but there are persistent serious failings in both quality and quantity**. Recent reports from peer organisations and the Ombudsperson corroborate residents' accounts of expired food<sup>58</sup>.

A 14-year-old girl from Afghanistan said that the food is so bad it is often thrown in the bin: **"It's a pity, something should be done"** (CH2). Poor food is a unanimous concern across children of all ages, genders, and locations. Taste is not the main concern - common issues included the inability to meet basic nutritional needs and the perceived negative health impact. One child in Ritsona shared, **"I don't eat the food because it gives me allergies."** (CH4). A caregiver from Sindiki further added, **"The younger ones do not accept to eat this food, they have no appetite"** (P3).

Not all camps are equally afflicted. Conditions in Schisto CAFTAAS were better. One caregiver said, **"They give us water whenever we ask, they give milk to the children, they give bread and food that is mostly not expired"** However, the absence of culturally appropriate meals remains an issue.

A child in Katsikas CAFTAAS offers a solution: **"Why they don't give us the oil, flour, eggs so that we can cook for ourselves"** (CH9). This desire for autonomous meal preparation contrasts sharply with the dependency enforced by some camps' rigid structures, causing frustration and indignity. Two children in a CAFTAAS in Central Macedonia summed it up **"They treat animals better than us"** (CH15 & CH16). As a consequence, families have relied on their minimal cash assistance to buy decent ingredients and food for their children, with some even re-cooking distributed food to make it edible.<sup>59</sup>

Already regularly disrupted, cash assistance has been suspended in summer 2024, leaving children struggling to meet even their most basic needs<sup>60</sup>.

“

The younger ones do not accept to eat this food, they have no appetite

**Food shortages persist after being granted asylum status.** When families receive a decision on the asylum application – positive or negative – adults will have their reception conditions, including food and cash assistance (for the family), cut off within 30 days (4939/2022, art.109). Children continue to receive food distribution. One mother explains the consequences, **"We got the rejection, as a punishment the cash card was cut off. What I suggest, not just for us but for all families, is that when parents get a rejection, of course the child gets a rejection too, so when they cut off the cash or benefit to the parents, they shouldn't cut it off for the children. It needs to continue for the children"** (P2).

Families awaiting decisions on subsequent asylum applications face similar difficulties, as camp management halts food assistance until documentation is received. Some parents resort to desperate measures, as one mother recounted, **"As they give to only one person (the child), I am forced, when they give me a bit of baby**

**milk and if my son does not drink all, to take a little to exchange it at the market. It's illegal, I was arrested, they fined me 1,000 euros, and I was doing all that just to find something to eat"** (P1).

Both the European Commission and the Ombudsman have raised concerns with the Greek authorities, emphasising that this practice breaches EU law and fundamental human rights<sup>61</sup>. Yet, nothing has changed. According to some, creating food insecurity is part of a broader strategy. Lefteris Papagiannakis, director of the Greek Council for Refugees, believes that **"Food insecurity is part of the deterrence approach of the Greek government and of the EU. A small, but very significant part"**<sup>62</sup>. Dr. Veizis, Executive Director of Intersos Hellas, observes: **"Young children and babies suffer developmental consequences due to lack of food and poor nutrition. Greece is using access to food as a weapon to deter migration while Europe looks away. The message is, 'Don't come'"**.<sup>63</sup>



# D

## “When it rains, it drips water on us, and there are cockroaches”<sup>65</sup>

Housing conditions for refugees vary, with children often feeling relief when moving from the island CCACs to mainland CAFTAAS. While the CAFTAAS containers with basic amenities are better than those on the islands<sup>66</sup>, conditions remain far from dignified. A caregiver from Sintiki shared the harsh reality: **“They transferred us there (Sintiki) and the conditions were very bad. First of all, it was a room, no toilet, you had to walk for 10 minutes to go to the toilet. No place to cook, there was a common kitchen that was far away, and men had priority. Sometimes we were scared to go alone. The conditions were very difficult, and it wasn’t a place to stay with children” (P3).**

Discrepancies in reception conditions also exist between mainland camps as there is no coordinated maintenance effort. The EU Commission officials highlighted the importance to regularly and timely renew framework contracts for maintenance and other services., Infrastructure issues are widespread including broken showers, cockroaches, bed bugs, mould growth, and electrical dangers<sup>67</sup>.



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# IV. Barriers to realizing children's right to inclusive education



## Educational rights and barriers for asylum seeking and refugee children in Greece.

According to the asylum code, children seeking asylum must attend primary and secondary school within the public education system, with conditions comparable to those of Greek citizens<sup>68</sup>. In 2023, **84%** (14,046 students) of the estimated **16,770** refugee and asylum-seeking children **registered** were attending school, which represents **a significant improvement from 2021**.<sup>69</sup>

In recent research, the Greek Council for Refugees and Save the Children<sup>70</sup> shone a light on persistent obstacles for children to **access** formal education. Obstacles include delays for the reception classes<sup>71</sup>, transportation difficulties and staffing issues, despite year-on-year improvements.

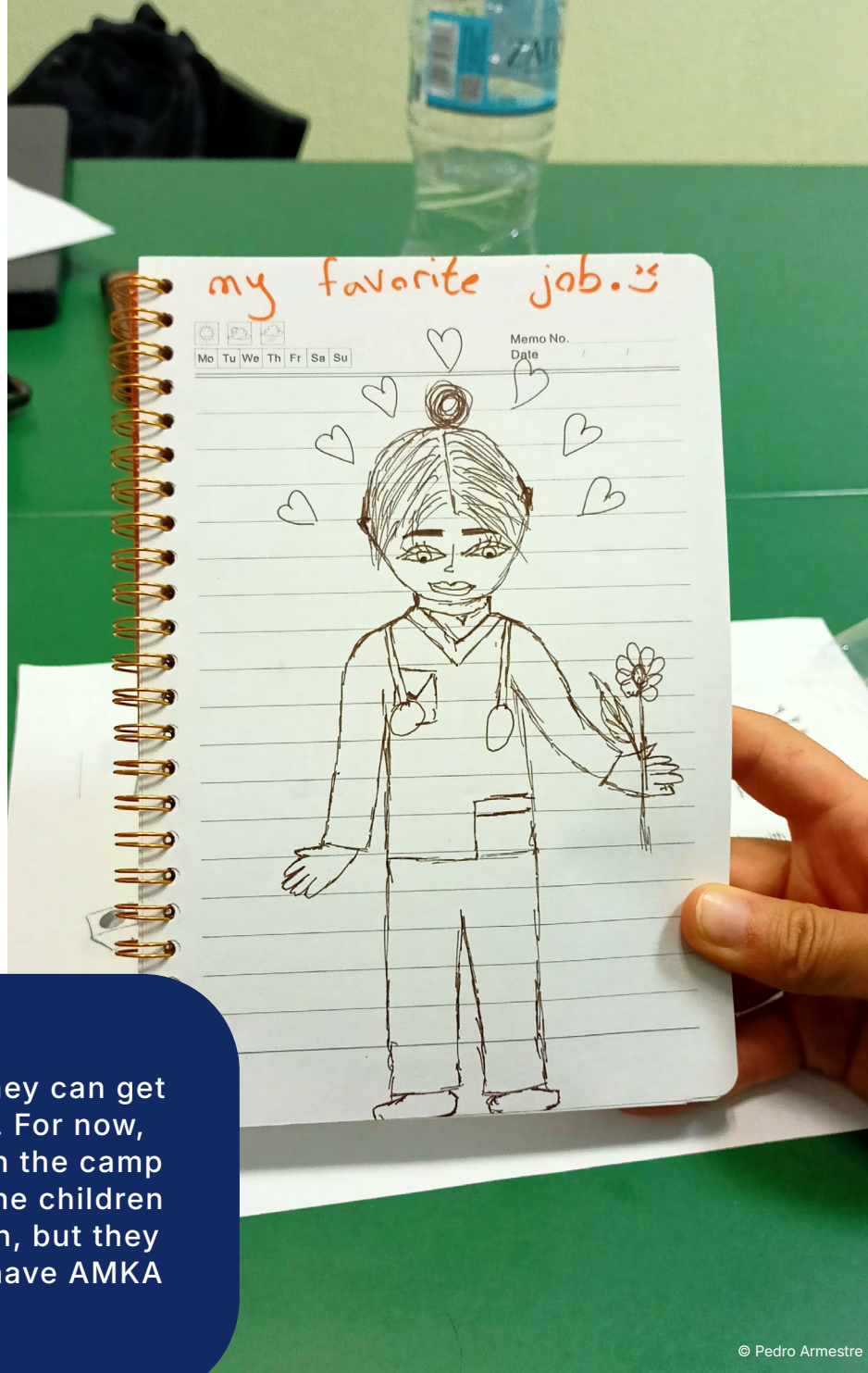
Several factors contribute to school **dropout rates**- harsh living conditions in camps, difficult access to asylum services, and the uncertainty surrounding their legal status. These all undermine children's ability to focus on and regularly attend school (Ibid.). This situation is intensified by gaps within the educational system itself. Only 1.9% of teachers in reception classes are permanent, while 57.6% are in need of specialised training<sup>72</sup>.





Interviews show that levels of access to education for asylum-seeking children depends on their location and reception structure.<sup>73</sup> For instance, \*Zina and \*Mari, residing in Polykastro CAAFTAS, were already enrolled in school three weeks after their arrival. In contrast, many families face much longer delays. One caregiver from Sintiki expressed frustration over the lack of educational opportunities: **“There are no schools, and we have to give our phones to the children to keep them quiet. When we asked ‘what about the school?’, we wanted to transfer so our children could go to school, but they told us we had to stay here and wait for the outcome of our legal case” (P3).**

The school registration process creates high hurdles. **“Nobody can tell us how to register our children for school” (P4).** In Schisto, one frustrated caregiver said, **“I’m only sad because other children go to school and mine don’t for a year. This makes them sad” (P6 & P7).** She further explained the discrimination they face due to documentation issues: **“Once we have the papers, they can get registered in public**



Once we have the papers, they can get registered in public school. For now, they can only go to school in the camp for one hour. For example, the children need to do some vaccination, but they cannot because they don't have AMKA

**school. For now, they can only go to school in the camp for one hour. For example, the children need to do some vaccination, but they cannot because they don't have AMKA<sup>74</sup>(P6 & P7).**

For children in remote camps, transport to school is an issue. Younger children can use private buses to go to school, but those over 15 must use public transport. Where no public transport is available, the Ministry of Interior (Moi) arranges private buses. However, transport provision does not always happen in reality. As an expert from UNHCR observed, **“[In some camps] there was no transportation for children; in other camps, transportation started, was interrupted, restarted, or when interrupted, never resumed”.** It's more straightforward for camps near urban areas, as a parent from Diavata camp acknowledges, **“It's very easy, they pick her up and bring her in by bus” (P2).**

#### Barriers to school integration

A recurring theme in children's accounts was a **sense of isolation in education settings**, which takes two distinct forms.

Firstly, social isolation and a lack of companionship within the school setting impedes school attendance. A child from Kavala CAAFTAS said, **“To be with a lot of people from other countries, nationalities, languages, it's not a problem—but I want company. I'm not used to being alone”(CH15).** Similarly, a teenage girl from Katsikas CAAFTAS shared that **“things are more difficult for our little brother, who is 11 and does not know anyone” (CH9).** A 15-year-old girl from Diavata camp explained how the absence of companionship discouraged her from going

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on school trips: ***“Because I’m alone I didn’t want to go. I had no company, no one to talk to, what can I do” (CH10).*** She also highlighted the divisions amongst students: ***“The Greeks talk in between them, the Arabs talk in between them, the Afghans talk in between them”.***

Attending school with siblings or peers eases the transition and encourages regular attendance, but barriers remain. A child from Ritsona camp highlighted her perception of segregation in schools: ***“I don’t have Greek friends, I don’t know why. We have our classes separated and then we have the classes with the other kids but stay for a little while, one hour. In Kavala, I had more friends because there was no reception department there, I had more classes with the Greeks, so we bonded more”(CH5).*** This separation not only limits interaction but also reinforces divisions, as she further explained: ***“When we go to Chalkida we all leave together but when we arrive to Chalkida we separate, it’s us the kids from Ritsona and the other kids.”(CH5).***For refugee and migrant children, the absence of social connections with their Greek classmates - often reinforced by systemic separation can stop them from engaging in school life, limiting opportunities for social and cultural inclusion.

Secondly, as already highlighted, **geographical isolation** hinders refugee children’s ability to engage with school and social systems. As an officer from the Independent Department for Coordination and Monitoring of Refugee Education (MoE) noted, ***“this distance from the urban fabric complicates efforts to integrate these children into mainstream educational and social systems” (KII6).*** The same expert



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also pointed out the significant decline in educational access and attendance after the ESTIA urban accommodation scheme ended : ***“Since the ESTIA urban scheme was dropped, we saw a huge difference in children” (KII6).*** On the same note, a UNICEF expert gives evidence that refugee children in urban areas have a far greater chance of meaningful progress in their education and integration into society: ***“Families should move quickly towards more inclusive conditions of existence. We saw this at the time when we were assessing with MoMA every few months the children’s progress in Greek. If you compared a group of children in the first reception, in Lesvos, Chios or Samos, with a child in a mainland facility and a child in the urban fabric, you were talking about three completely different groups. The first children were all A0 level in Greek, they said three words, that was the situation. In the second group, you were starting to have a mixed situation—there were kids learning, but the majority were at a***



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very beginner level. In the third group, the urban area, you saw hope, kids improving, moving on" (K11).

**Discrimination** worsens the situation for many children. While not the majority, a few children mentioned that discrimination put them off going to school. One 14-year-old from Kavala shared how his experience of bullying and the lack of subsequent support led them to quit school: **"Only one kid was racist. Even though I was playing with other Greek kids, only that kid would treat me badly and be violent. There were trees with fruits, and he would take the fruits and throw them at me. I told the teacher what happened, and the teacher was angry with me. So, the kid kept doing the same. Then I stopped going to school"**.

children. An MoE official (K116) insightfully described systemic neglect, as a form of **"hidden systemic violence"**, emphasising how the system fails to account for the difficult starting points of children residing in camps. An education expert working with UNICEF reinforces this, noting that a truly inclusive approach does not often happen: **"the majority of these children are in an educational context that says to you, 'Sit here, do what you can, I will treat you with sympathy, charity that is. I will not cut you off, I will let you be in class even though you don't understand. I will not address you all the time, sometimes I won't even give you a book because what are you going to do with a book'"**(K11).



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Caregivers also reported experiences of racism: **"From the beginning, we felt different because of our ethnicity; they told us not to ask for too much. You are not the same as the rest"** (P3). RIS employees stresses the need to combat systemic racism with one saying, **"Criminal justice should intervene when someone is denied access to a bus with available seats simply because they are identified as a Muslim or foreigner"** (K17).

### Pathways facilitating inclusion and resilience in education

**Extracurricular activities** like school excursions help children to integrate. They are a **"a breather, a chance to escape"** according to a RIS employee (K17). Children said they like interacting with Greek peers during excursions, which helped them build connections and feel accepted. However, many mentioned that they often couldn't afford excursions. When available, NGO-run community centres near camps offer vital support through informal education, such as gender-specific programmes, skills workshops, and language lessons, all of which children valued highly. These centres are a safe environment that complements formal schooling and indirectly supports attendance. In Ritsona, and Katsikas, for example, children are taken out to play football, which they really enjoyed. Such activities bring a **sense of normalcy and emotional relief** amidst the challenges of camp life. Experts called out initiatives like the **ACE project** that are vital in bridging families with formal education, thereby increasing school participation. However, in a big loss for children, the ACE project finished in July 2024.





A key driver of school engagement, according to experts, is the resilience and determination of both children and their parents. Despite many barriers, families often make significant efforts to ensure children attend school. A RIS employee said, **“Children attending school is a strong stabilising factor for the whole family, especially in this context” (KII4)**. This resilience is especially evident in younger children who, rise above challenging environments to adapt and learn through peer interactions. However, as children enter adolescence, external pressures and barriers increase, and **“play gets lost”**. A UNICEF expert noted, **“It takes too much courage, too much mental toughness, too much resilience to make it, especially as they get older” (KII1)**. Another expert observed that the desire to improve their circumstances and get a job motivates older children to stay in school. A child confirms this: **“I don’t like school so much, but I go every day. I want to go to become someone” (CH1)**.


“

Children attending school  
is a strong stabilising  
factor for the whole family,  
especially in this context



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# V. Children's well-being in *the context of camp life*

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The majority of children consulted said that reception conditions made them feel lonely, unhappy, sleep deprived, anxious, and most often, bored, worried and stressed. Children reflected on how the setup of the camp, with barbed wire and a detention-like atmosphere, contributes to **feelings of depression** and crushes their hopes for the future. Many children thought camp life impacted on their development, expressing sentiments such as **'camp is not a good place to grow up'** (CH1) or **'children do not have a good time here'** (CH2, CH3)<sup>75</sup>. Experts in the field also observed distressing behaviours among children, with reports of frustration, anger, rage, and signs of withdrawal.

Alongside this, the dynamic between parents and children often changes in these contexts, with children taking some parental responsibilities. A ministry official observed, **"We have families whose children go to school, and we have noticed that a lot of times, instead of the parents exercising parental care, the children provide a kind of protection to the parents, either because they know the language better or help with day-to-day transactions. The children act as a compass for the parents, who, in the camp, often do nothing except occasionally work somewhere"** (KII6). This phenomenon is called "parentification" and can have long-term negative consequences on children's mental and emotional well-being, as it puts them under too much pressure, depriving them of a normal childhood<sup>76</sup>.

#### 'We walk around in circles'<sup>77</sup>

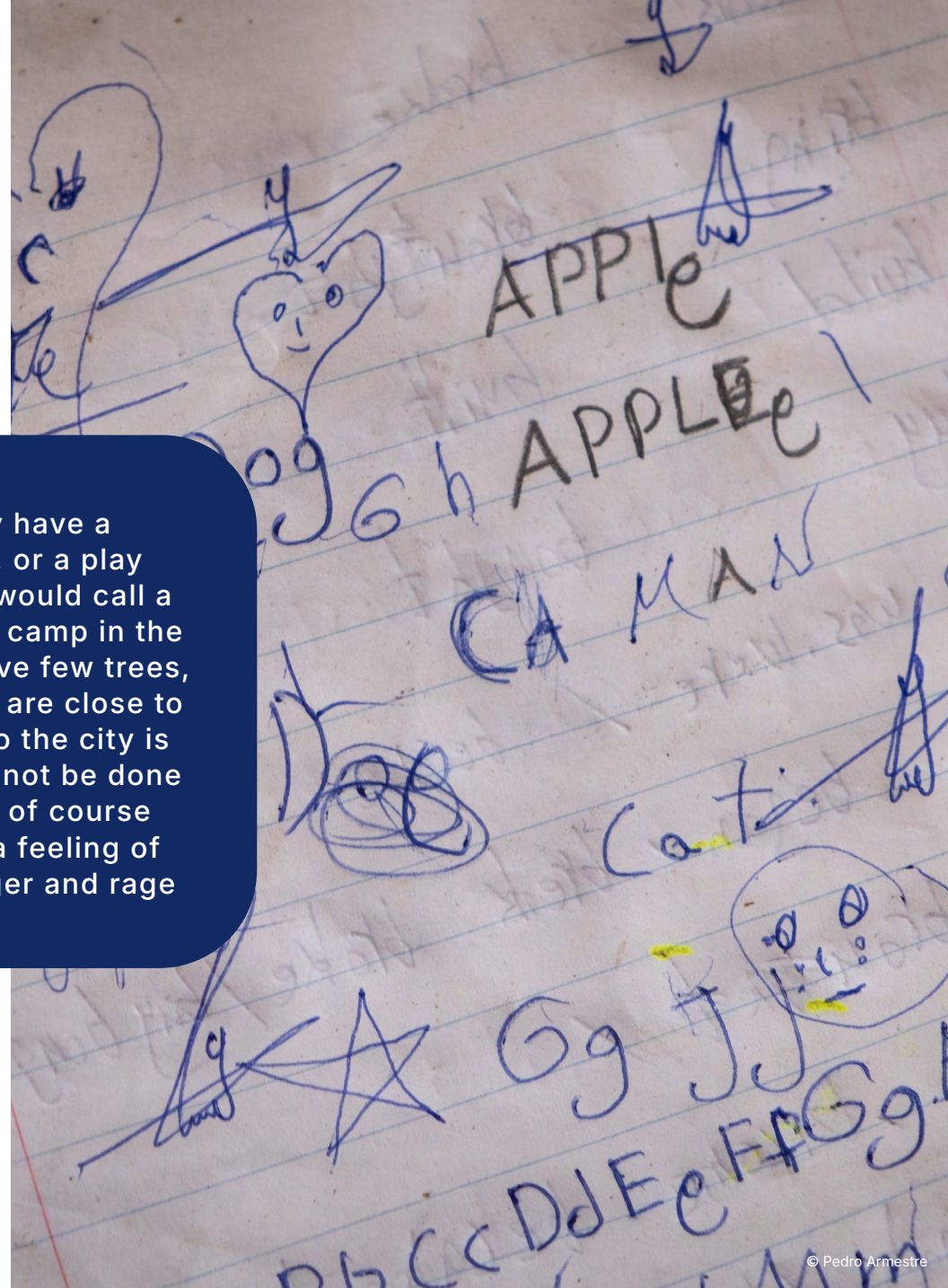
Camps' environments are woefully inadequate for children. A ministry official said, **"The fact**

**that they may have a rudimentary playground, or a play area, this is not what one would call a child-friendly space, it is a camp in the middle of nowhere, they have few trees, some nature, none of them are close to the urban fabric, access to the city is always very difficult, it cannot be done on a daily basis, and this of course obviously contributes to a feeling of frustration, but also of anger and rage"** (KII6).



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Structured psychosocial and recreational activities for children are non-existent or extremely limited. As a result, children have little or no activities outside school hours. Interviews with children, corroborated by caregivers, NGOs, and RIS employees, revealed a severe lack of child-friendly spaces or organised activities. Reflecting on the CAFTAAS camps on the mainland – compared with some of the CCACs







- one UNHCR respondent noted, ***“As far as the camps in the mainland are concerned, the shortages are much greater there because – in their big majority - we do not have multidisciplinary teams (...) we do not have playgrounds (...) no child friendly spaces (...) we are talking about very large deficiencies within the camps” (KI12).***

Even where sports areas exist, the equipment is reported as often insufficient, broken or the spaces are not child friendly <sup>78</sup>. Small-scale initiatives are typically age-restricted, leaving out many children. Some camps have either no or limited play opportunities or have playgrounds that do not meet safety and maintenance standards. The absence of organised activities, particularly for younger children who require continuous supervision, places additional strain on already overwhelmed caregivers. One mother of a child with autism says, ***‘At the African women’s camp, I am alone at first. I am alone. I have two children. The first one plays normally, he plays with the others; but with the little one [note: assessed with a developmental disability] I am just with him, locked up at home, he doesn’t speak, so he doesn’t have any friends to play with either’ (P1).***

**Play** is essential for children’s well-being, serving not only as a **fundamental right** under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, Article 12) but also as a critical tool for their development. Research underscores that play facilitates learning, reduces stress, and protects children from the long-term psychological impacts of prolonged exposure to stressful environments<sup>79</sup>



### Legal uncertainty and the struggle for a future

Most of the children and caregivers interviewed were still awaiting the outcome of their asylum determination processes. This legal uncertainty creates fear and weighs heavily on their emotional well-being, making it hard for them to envision a future. A 15-year-old girl from Afghanistan said, ***“It was very stressful and for that reason I started to lose my hair. It was stressful that we were waiting for a decision. A doctor noticed, and said it was because of stress” (CH13).*** Another child aged 13: ***“My biggest fear is not to receive asylum here and not to have ID and never to be able to go to school” (CH7).***

One caregiver reflected on the pervasive fear they experienced, with the threat of deportation hanging over them: ***“I feel safer here. I just didn't have that for a while, feeling safe, because we kept getting rejections. I had the fear of being sent back to our country” (P2).***

***“As soon as you are recognized, there is nothing anymore”<sup>80</sup>***

Looking to the future, the children interviewed believe that other European countries provide greater support and opportunities for refugees than Greece. While being recognised as a refugee in Greece is a critical milestone, it does not guarantee improved living conditions or access to essential services - once recognised, institutional and financial support is withdrawn.

What follows are multiple difficulties: finding a job, earning an income, receiving financial aid, accessing Greek language classes, getting childcare, and finding their own accommodation<sup>81</sup>, all covered by a sense of abandonment: ***“The idea that when you become***

***a refugee, you no longer receive aid is poorly designed. They could at least give half of what we receive as asylum seekers. They make life more difficult for us; we suffer a lot” (P1).*** As one expert remarked, ***“If they get the positive scenario of being recognised, then what? Victoria Square forever!”<sup>82</sup> (KII3).*** This makes children want to leave Greece for countries where integration and dignified living seems more attainable.

Although not the primary focus of this research, feedback from children and caregivers shed light on the significant impact of inadequate integration support on their hopes for their future, creating a sense of stagnation. Several stressed the importance of language support for adults, essential for rebuilding lives and integrating into society. As one caregiver from Schisto expressed: ***“What we want is peace, our children to go to school and learn the language. We as adults would also like to go to school and learn the language and set up our lives” (P6 & P7).***

The EU Commission officials consulted also raised the question of when integration efforts should begin: ***“Should it start from the time that someone arrives, or from the time that someone received refugee status? (KII5).*** The Greek Government relies too heavily on camps, where short-term cost-savings overshadow long-term integration strategies. The Independent Department for Coordination and Monitoring of Refugee Education of the MoE reports: ***“Unfortunately, the Greek Authorities decided to, for specific reasons, mostly for cost efficiency, to offer, as a mainstream option, the camps” (KII6).*** Undersupported at every stage of the asylum process, refugees face an uphill battle for meaningful participation in society.



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***It was very stressful and for that reason I started to lose my hair. It was stressful that we were waiting for a decision. A doctor noticed, and said it was because of stress***



## Case study: Amira's story

\*Amira, a 16-year-old from Afghanistan, has been living in Katsikas Camp for four months. She shares a small container with her three younger siblings and her parents.

They worry for their safety. Amira vividly recalls when her 10-year-old brother was hit hard with a stone. Despite alerting camp security, they received little help. **"They told us to call the police ourselves. When we did, the man and his family came back and hit us again."** After the attack, her brother needed medical attention, but there was no doctor available, so they had to call an ambulance to get him treated. Amira felt shaken by this experience. **"I couldn't sleep after that."**

Amira describes life in the camp as **"suffocating"** over time. **"For the short time it's okay, but if you live longer, you start feeling like you're not free. It feels like depression,"** she explains. The layout of the camp reinforces these feelings: **"When we leave the camp, we have to show our ID cards and get checked every time we come and go. It doesn't feel like real life."** The camp does have some amenities for children, but for younger children like her brother, the options are limited. **"They changed the rules at the Hamal\* Community Centre so now children under 15, like my brother, can't go there anymore. He just sits in the camp, on his phone or sometimes plays football."**

Amira could not stop talking about the Hamal\* Community Centre: **"I spend my time here; I feel like home"**. Education, however, has been

a positive aspect, despite the initial challenges she faced: **"I didn't go to school for a long time because, when we came here, we had to wait for the registration in the school."**

Amira finds her Greek language classes helpful in adjusting to her new environment, and feels welcomed by her Greek classmates. Amira is particularly concerned about her younger brother's mental health. **"He doesn't have many friends, and he feels so alone. We've taken him to see a psychologist in the camp, but it's just a quick meeting and then 'goodbye'."** His stress manifests physically: "He's so sad, he eats his nails. They told us it's because of stress—from our journey and everything." Amira explains that, unlike her, her younger brother struggles both to understand their situation and to recover from the emotional and physical toll of their journey to Greece, magnified by the attack he suffered from in the camp. She reflects **"The way that we came to the Greece and from Iran to Türkiye it was difficult, it was so difficult. For me and my sister, we are bigger, we can understand. But for my brother, I think he can't take it, and as a child, of course, he wants a normal life like the other children"**.

Although Amira is grateful for the safety Greece has offered her and her family, she is also keenly aware of the challenges ahead: **"You don't know for how long you will be staying here. You just wait and wait. We have some people in the camp for five years"**. Amira also reflects on the struggles recognised refugees face when attempting to integrate into Greek society: **"Even**

**if we get our paper, we don't know languages, we can't work, we can't have a job. And this is a problem"**. Despite these challenges, she dreams of continuing her studies and playing volleyball: **"I love volleyball, and I want to continue it in the future, I would like to study in the university"**.



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## Children: the impact of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum

The EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, adopted in May 2024, raises critical concerns about the protection of children's rights within the migration system. Child rights organisations, like Save the Children have warned that the Pact could result in blatant violations of children's rights —ranging from the systematic detention of children to severe restrictions on access to asylum and family reunification. These measures, Save the Children argues, will endanger children on the move, increasing the risk of family separation **(SCI, 2023 and HRW, 2023)**.

Children, including unaccompanied minors, are subjected to the same screening and border procedures as adults, without sufficient **child-specific safeguards**. A major concern is the risk of **de facto detention**, particularly during the screening process, which can last up to seven days and may occur in facilities that do not meet the required standards for child protection.

Although the regulation stresses the “best interests of the child” in decision-making, its provisions fall short of ensuring consistent involvement of **child protection actors**. Furthermore, there is a lack of clear mechanisms to provide immediate guardianship for unaccompanied minors, leaving children vulnerable during critical phases of their migration journey. The collection of biometric data from children as young as six, along with the potential use of coercion, also raises significant ethical concerns.

Viewed in its entirety, the Pact appears less focused on safeguarding the rights and protection of refugees, and more concerned with controlling and restricting their entry into Europe, undermining the EU's commitments under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, particularly with regard to the protection, dignity, and well-being of children in migration.



# Conclusion and recommendations



This policy paper, centred on the voices of children and caregivers, presents a stark call for the Greek government to respond to the severe challenges children are facing in refugee camps (CAFTAAS) in mainland Greece. Children reveal the detrimental effects of isolation – both physical and psychological – on their well-being. The research depicts camps, often resembling large, restrictive institutions, that magnify social exclusion and deprive children and their families of essential rights such as education and healthcare. Unreliable transportation and poor access to nutritious, appropriate food compound the problem. Children frequently report feelings of loneliness, stress, and boredom, made worse by the absence of child-friendly spaces and adequate mental health support.

The Greek government's approach of remotely-located, under-resourced mass camp facilities, with minimal access to essential services fails to uphold children's rights as enshrined in the UNCRC. These conditions not only fall short of minimum legal standards but also intensify the

mental health challenges and social isolation of residents, further obstructing their integration into Greek society. Beyond that, in the treatment of asylum applications, the legal framework often overlooks the individual circumstances and best interests of **accompanied** children. The process does not provide the in-depth analysis required by the UNCRC, particularly for the child's specific needs and vulnerabilities.

Moving forward, European and national asylum and migration policies, including the implementation of the Pact on migration and asylum, must focus on **protection and integration**, ensuring that every child is treated with dignity, their essential needs met, and their rights upheld. It is crucial for European political leaders, including those in Greece, to commit to policies that protect the rights and dignity of all children on the move, considering the best interests of children at every step of the migration process, and **ensuring that they are seen as children first, not merely as migrants or asylum seekers.**

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The Greek Council for Refugees and Save the Children are calling upon the Greek Government and the EU to:

### 1 Move away from camps to urban reception for children asylum seekers and their families.

Camps are no place for children to grow. Transition from the mass camp system to urban reception models, which provide safer, more stable environments for children and their families. The ESTIA programme showed that this approach is viable. Sustained support from EU and national funding must help to meet Greece's obligations under EU law to ensure adequate reception conditions for child asylum seekers and their families.

### 2. In the meantime, ensure children enjoy special reception condition as they are entitled to, with comprehensive access to services for children and their families in camps.

Within camps, children's access to their basic rights and security must be a priority.

### 3. Ensure early integration of children and their families from day one<sup>83</sup>:

It is crucial for the Greek government to prioritise the integration of asylum-seeking children and their families from the moment they arrive at reception facilities:

- **Pursue efforts on Education:** successful integration begins with immediate access to formal education. To improve school attendance, the GoG should address key barriers such as transportation, social integration, and timely educational access. Programs like the [ACE project](#) have effectively bridged gaps between families, schools, and services. The government must secure long-term funding to

expand these initiatives, particularly in camps where isolation hinders participation. Offer clear pathways for further development, including vocational training within the formal education system.

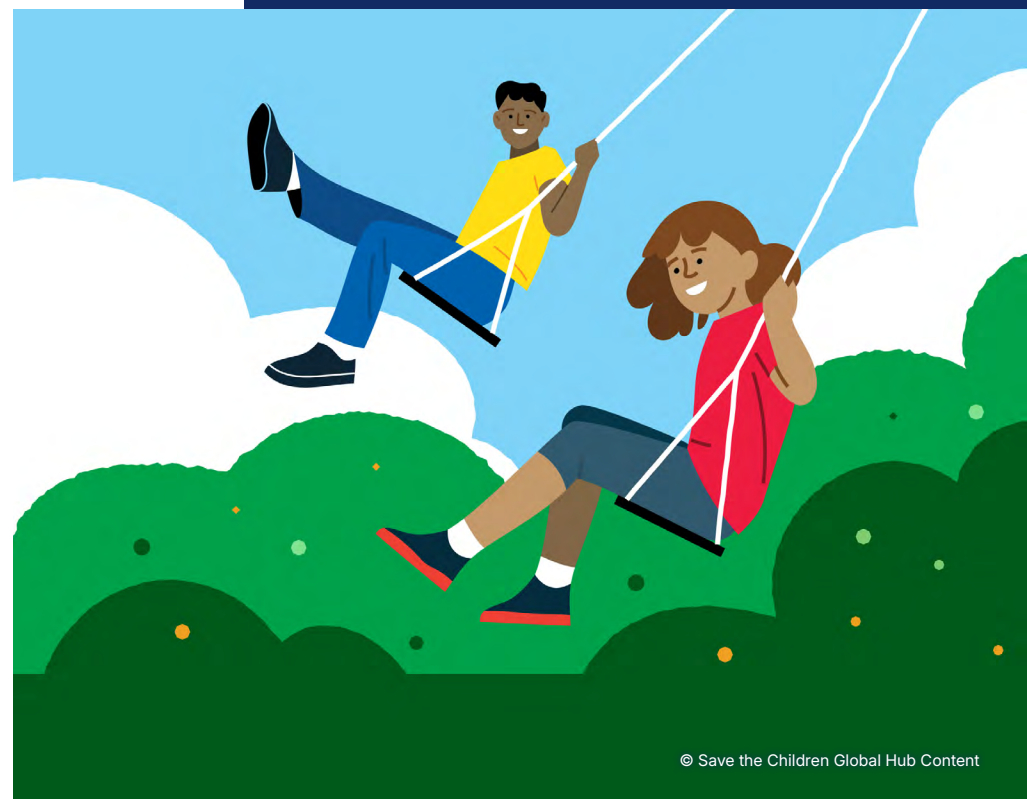
- **Facilitate and co-design, in collaboration with children, greater opportunities** for interaction with their local counterparts through extracurricular activities, such as sports, arts and crafts, and organized school trips.

### - Support parents for successful integration.

Providing Greek language classes for adults within camps will empower parents to better support their children's education and integration. Ensuring **childcare options** and flexible schedules will enable mothers to participate, which in turn strengthens the family unit's ability to integrate into Greek society.

### 4. Ensure a child rights-compliant implementation of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum: The Greek government and EU authorities

must guarantee that the implementation of the **PACT** is underpinned by a strong focus on protecting children's best interests, upholding their rights, and ensuring their well-being throughout the asylum and migration process. The Pact contains strengthened provisions<sup>84</sup> aimed at protecting vulnerable groups, particularly unaccompanied children and families with children. In its **national implementation strategy**, the Greek Government, with EU support, should ensure **child-proof reception conditions** that uphold access to education, psychosocial and integration services, making sure that children to thrive **during and after** the asylum process.



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# ENDNOTES

- 1 [“24% of first-time asylum applicants were children in 2023”](#), Eurostats (2024)
- 2 [“Child migrant arrivals in Greece quadruple this year”](#), Save the Children (2024)
- 3 [Europe, Migrant and refugee children in Europe: Accompanied, Unaccompanied and Separated \(January – December 2023\), DTM”](#), IOM (2023)
- 4 [“EU-Turkey statement, 18 March 2016”](#), European Council (2016)
- 5 [Asylum Information Database Country Report: Greece](#), ECRE (2024)
- 6 SMS services were provided mainly by UNHCR and then IOM.
- 7 [“Refugee camps in mainland w”](#), Refugee Support Aegean (2024).
- 8 See art. 40, 44, 59, 62 of law 4939/2022. On 10 June 2022, law 4939/2022 (the Asylum Code) came into effect, codifying legislation on the reception and international protection of third-country nationals and stateless persons, as well as temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons.
- 9 Regarding the CAFTAAs on the mainland, specific budget allocations are funded by AMIF, see more at <https://tamey.gov.gr/amif2021-2027/>
- 10 ESTIA was an accommodation scheme including broader support services targeted at vulnerable asylum seekers. In 2022, the GoG decided to close this scheme, despite the EU commission willingness to continue funding it (RSA, 2024). Hundreds of families were then transferred back to camps, without regards to where children were going to schools, etc. (GCR, 2022)
- 11 See [Ministerial Decision 115202/2021](#)
- 12 Supporting the day-to-day management of the accommodation sites by performing activities such as reception, distributions, community engagement and care and maintenance.
- 13 [SMS Factsheets](#), IOM.
- 14 The interviewees were predominantly individuals receiving assistance from GCR and were selected using a convenience sampling approach. GCR’s social workers, working closely with GCR lawyers, coordinated with the research team to ensure support structures were in place to address emerging protection concerns, which arose on several occasions. As per both NGOs’ Child Safeguarding Policies, interviews with children were conducted exclusively in person.
- 15 At the time of the interviews, 13 children were awaiting decisions on their asylum applications, 2 had already been granted refugee status, and one child was in the process of appealing a rejected asylum claim.
- 16 One of them in Schisto being unofficially considered as facility for vulnerable asylum seekers, together with the one of Pyrgos.
- 17 Including GCR and SC research and assessments in Greece and across European countries where the organisations operate.
- 18 Her and her twin sister.
- 19 [“Migrant and Refugee Children Via Mixed Migration Routes in Europe: Accompanied, Unaccompanied and Separated: Overview of Trends”](#), IOM, UNHCR and UNICEF (2023)
- 20 [“Wherever we go, Someone does us Harm: Violence against refugee and migrant children arriving in Europe through the Balkans”](#), SCI (2022)
- 21 Pushback are widely considered a human rights violation both because of the risk of refoulement as well as the violence and danger to which people are exposed during pushbacks (IOM, 2022).
- 22 « European Court Slams Greece Over Deadly Migrant Pushback », HRW (2022)
- 23 Since 2020, pushbacks have been used systematically by the GoG to stop refugees and dissuade others from attempting irregular border crossings, in the face of consistent criticism by UNHCR, IOM and the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, the Council of Europe Commissioner, and civil society organisations. The national recording mechanism, in which the GCR has actively participated since its establishment, reported in 2023 a minimum of 1,438 persons affected, including at least 158 women, 190 children, and 41 individuals with special needs (NCHR, 2023). The majority of these individuals are from countries whose nationals are frequently granted international protection status in Greece and the EU ([https://nchr.gr/images/pdf/RecMechanism/Final\\_Annual\\_Report\\_202311.pdf](https://nchr.gr/images/pdf/RecMechanism/Final_Annual_Report_202311.pdf))
- 24 For example, in May 2023, the New York Times published a video which shows children being detained and left at sea by Greek authorities ([NYT, 2023](#)). This incident is at the moment investigated by the greek judicial authorities, following a joint action from several Greek NGOs. In June 2024, a [BBC documentary](#) on the issue was aired.
- 25 [“GCR’s Information Note on interventions and on interim measures granted by the ECtHR in cases regarding pushbacks”](#), GCR (2024)
- 26 Quote from an MoE official.
- 27 [“Initial-reception facilities at external borders: fundamental rights issues to consider”](#), FRA (2021).
- 28 Quote from a caregiver staying in Sintiki/ Serres camp.
- 29 [“Refugee camps in mainland Greece”](#), Refugee Support Aegean (2024).
- 30 This service is funded by the [Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund \(AMIF\) 2021-2027](#), along with national contributions from the Public Investments Program (see here). The purpose of the transportation programme is to ensure that asylum seekers and other third-country nationals can access essential services in nearby cities, such as legal, medical, and administrative appointments.
- 31 This has been a recurring issue, as seen in 2023 when services were halted for a significant part of the year before being reinstated in early 2024. As of September 2024, transportation services are once again suspended, with NGOs reporting in protection working groups that even transfers from Fylakio RIS to mainland CAFTAAS facilities must now be covered by asylum seekers at their own expense.
- 32 The Ombudsperson reported that even when bus stops are relatively close (Diavata, Schisto), children face potential hazards due to the exposed location, which lacks proper shelter and safe crossings (Greek Ombudsperson, 2024)
- 33 “The Challenge of Migratory Flows and Refugee Protection Reception Conditions and Procedures”, The Greek Ombudman (2024)
- 34 Asylum Information Database Country Report: Greece, ECRE (2024)
- 35 “UN High Commissioner for Refugees wraps up visit to Greece: welcomes progress on integration and urges continued efforts”, UNHCR (2024); See also RLS, 2024; Greek Ombudsperson, 2024
- 36 [UNHCR-IOM-UNICEF Joint Submission for the Universal Periodic Review - Greece – UPR”](#), UNHCR (2021:p:8).
- 37 [“EASO guidance on reception conditions: operational standards and indicators”](#), EASO (2016)
- 38 Caregiver of a 7-year-old in a Northern CAFTAAS describing a negative experience when requesting a transfer for her family due to safety concerns.
- 39 Child protection services refer to a set of interventions designed to prevent and respond to abuse, exploitation, neglect, and violence against children. These services encompass various activities, from safeguarding children at risk to providing care, legal support, and rehabilitation for those who have experienced harm. They operate at multiple levels, including family, community, and institutional settings, and are guided by national and international child rights frameworks.
- 40 In December 2023, the EUAA had 486 experts present in Greece, including 46 caseworkers and 44 case management reception assistants ([AIDA, 2024](#)).
- 41 EASO is expected to ‘Support in the set-up and roll-out of a case management system in the second-line reception system, which aims to ensure identification of needs, referral and follow up for residents’, while 29 Reception Assistants are to be in place for vulnerable applicants together with 80 Case Management Assistants (Operation Plan, 2022-24, pp.25-26)
- 42 [“Operating plan 2022-2024 agreed by the European asylum support office and Greece”](#), EASO (2021:p:24-26)
- 43 See section C for more information.
- 44 [“Mental health of refugees and migrants: risks and protective factors and access to care”](#), WHO (2023). Research has shown that untreated mental health conditions during childhood and adolescence can lead to educational difficulties, physical health problems, and social isolation. Over time, these factors contribute to poorer long-term physical and mental health outcomes, as well as diminished economic productivity in adulthood.
- 45 ECtHR, Mubilanzila Mayeka and Kaniki Mitunga v. Belgium, No. 13178/03, 12 October 2006, para. 55; Muskhadzhiyeva and Others v. Belgium, No. 41442/07, 19 January 2010, paras. 56-58; S.F. and Others v. Bulgaria, No. 8138/16, 7 December 2017, para. 79; Popov v. France, Nos. 39472/07 and 39474/07, 19 January 2012, para. 91; G.B. and Others v. Türkiye, No. 4633/15, 17 October 2019, para. 101; Tarakhel v. Switzerland [GC], No. 29217/12, 4 November 2014, para. 99; M.H. and Others v. Croatia, Nos. 15670/18 & 43115/18, 18 November 2021, para. 184
- 46 “Children in migration: fundamental rights at European borders”, FRA (2023)
- 47 ECtHR, Popov v. France, Nos. 39472/07 and 39474/07, 19 January 2012, para. 91; Mubilanzila Mayeka and Kaniki Mitunga v. Belgium, No. 13178/03, 12 October 2006, para. 55; Muskhadzhiyeva and Others v. Belgium, No. 41442/07, 19 January 2010, para. 58; Khan v. France, No. 12267/16, 28 February 2019, para. 74
- 48 Mainland», Mobile Info Team (2024)
- 49 [“Asylum and Migration Internal Fund \(AMIF\). Provision of food services in the facilities of Reception and Identification Service \(mainland\) »](#), Hellenic Republic (website)



- 51 See for example, ECtHR - M.S.S. v Belgium and Greece [GC], Application No. 30696/09 (p:173-188).
- 52 Two children from Kavala expressed frustration with the quality of care they received (CH15&CH16)
- 53 [“Refugee camps in mainland Greece”](#), Refugee Support Aegean (2024). [“The Challenge of Migratory Flows and Refugee Protection Reception Conditions and Procedures”](#), The Greek Ombudsman (2024)
- 54 [“Refugee camps in mainland Greece”](#), Refugee Support Aegean (2024).
- 55 Iatriki Athinon S.A.
- 56 Only 3 out of 7 public hospitals have interpretation services and for limited languages (RSA, 2024).
- 57 [“Voices from the Camps: Living Conditions and Access to Services in Refugee Camps on the Greek Mainland”](#), Mobile Info Team (2024).
- 58 13-year-old boy residing in Ritsona CAFTAAS.
- 59 [“Voices from the Camps: Living Conditions and Access to Services in Refugee Camps on the Greek Mainland”](#), Mobile Info Team (2024); [“The Challenge of Migratory Flows and Refugee Protection Reception Conditions and Procedures”](#), The Greek Ombudsman (2024).
- 60 According to MD 2857/2021 (OGG B’4496) it’s €135 for couples or single parents with one child, or €210 for families of four or more.
- 61 [“JOINT STATEMENT: Provision of cash assistance to asylum seekers in Greece must resume immediately”](#), Joint Statement (2024)
- 62 Letter from MsYlva Johansson member of the European Commission Home Affairs (2021)
- 63 « Why getting asylum in Greece can mean going hungry », The Christian Science Monitor (2024)
- 64 Ibid.
- 65 A parent of an 8-year-old girl, living together in a container in Diavata
- 66 Most mainland camps provide accommodation in the form of containers shared by one or more family units.
- 67 [“Voices from the Camps: Living Conditions and Access to Services in Refugee Camps on the Greek Mainland”](#), Mobile Info Team (2024);
- 68 [Asylum Information Database Country Report: Greece, ECRE \(2024\)](#) Failure to comply with school registration and attendance requirements may result in restrictions on material reception conditions, such as shelter and food, imposed on the adult members of the minor’s family (Article 55, paragraph 2 of Law 4939/2022).
- 69 « Must do better: Grading the Greek government’s efforts on education for refugee children », GCR and SCI (2022). <https://reliefweb.int/report/Greece/must-do-better-grading-greek-governments-efforts-education-refugee-children>
- 70 Ibid. [“Back to School? Refugee children in Greece denied right to education”](#), GCR and SCI (2021)
- 71 These classes prepare children for Greek schools and curriculum, including through language support
- 72 Information shared by KII.
- 73 Children on the CCACs on the islands generally face even greater barriers to schooling
- 74 AMKA is the Greek Social Security Number, required for accessing healthcare, social services, and enrolling in public schools. Many asylum-seeking children lack AMKA due to bureaucratic hurdles, delays in processing asylum applications, or legal status issues, which prevent them from obtaining the necessary documentation. As a result, they face significant barriers in registering for formal education and accessing essential services (free vaccination, etc.).
- 75 For children on the islands, especially those confined to closed facilities, the impact on their sense of freedom was notable: ‘I neither go to school here [Kos], nor do I have any toys; I feel imprisoned’(CH7) (see also section C).
- 76 [“The Developmental Implications of Parentification: Effects on Childhood Attachment”](#), Jennifer A. Engelhardt, Graduate Student Journal of Psychology, 2012, Vol. 14
- 77 e.g. during the data collection period, an informant shared with GCR that in an Epirus CAFTAAS, snakes were present in the uncut grass of the kindergarten’s playground, posing imminent dangers to little children
- 78 Single mother from a Northern CAFTAAS
- 79 [“Learning through play: what the science says”](#), The Lego Foundation (website); [“Children’s mental health Matters”](#), Right to Play (website); [“Child’s Play: Examining the Association Between Time Spent Playing and Child Mental Health”](#), Helen Dodd et al. (2022)
- 80 Single mother of 2 children from Alexandria CAFTAAS.
- 81 The informant refers to a Square in Athens where refugees have been at times seeking shelter, see indicatively incidents of 2020 in Euronews and in October 2023 in News24|7
- 82 In all the above, recognised refugees can get support by [HELIOS](#) project, implemented by IOM, but in practice there are practical difficulties hindering enrollment in this project (e.g. not covering all of Greece, beneficiaries should be able to afford months’ house rents and more)
- 83 The reception model itself has a significant impact on the integration prospects of children – see recommendation 1.
- 84 For example, provisions on maintaining family unity throughout the asylum process or on providing special reception conditions for families, on prioritizing vulnerable groups, including families with children in the asylum process.

**Published by**

Save the Children International  
and the Greek Council for Refugees

Published December 2024

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