

HUMAN
RIGHTS
WATCH

April 19, 2018 3:08PM EDT | Dispatches

Greece's Highest Court Rules to Better Protect Asylum Seekers

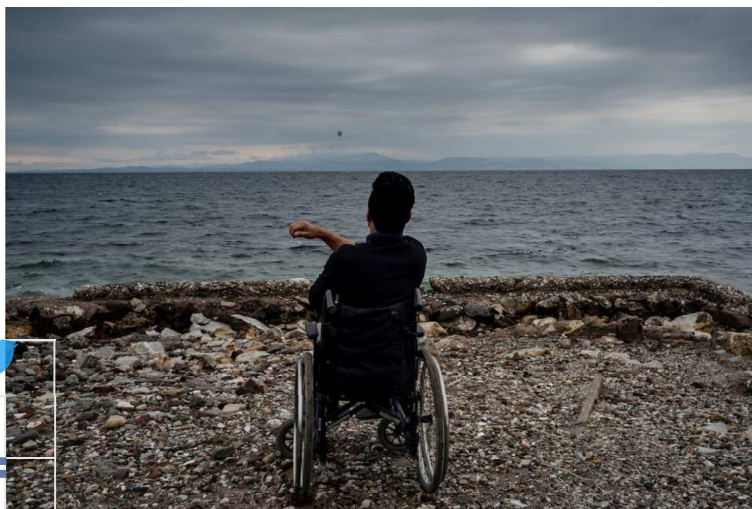
New Arrivals Can No Longer Be Trapped in Abuse on Greek Islands



Eva Cossé

Western Europe researcher

Eva_Cosse



Greece refugee in wheel chair

MORE READING



March 19, 2018 | Q 8

Why Greece Should #OpenTheIsland



March 19, 2018
| Dispatches

Greece's highest administrative court, the Council of State, ordered the government to end its policy of trapping asylum seekers on its islands and refusing to move them to safer conditions on the mainland.

This ruling, handed down on Tuesday, means new asylum seekers and migrants who arrive by sea via Turkey will now be allowed to move the mainland where they can access services and be humanely accommodated. However, the ruling does not apply to asylum seekers who are already contained on the islands, before the court's decision.

The Stories of Asylum Seekers Trapped in Greece

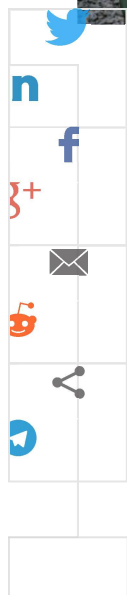
By the latest government count, more than 15,400 asylum seekers are on the Greek islands, many of them in **filthy and vastly overcrowded centers**. Our research shows that people – including women and children – are forced to sleep in flimsy tents or on the ground, even through the winter. There is little access to medical care, **education**, or other basic services.



Trapped: Asylum Seekers in Greece

In this special feature, Emina Ćerimović and photographer Zalmai investigate the mental health crisis facing asylum seekers on the island of Lesbos.

[READ MORE](#)



While conditions on the mainland need improvement, they are much better than on the islands. Facilities there are not too crowded, and people are protected from rain, wind, and extreme temperatures. They are also safer. People also have better access to services such as hospitals and specialized health care, and children can enroll in school.

Last December, 13 nongovernmental groups, including Human Rights Watch, launched the **#OpenTheIslands campaign**, calling on Greece to transfer asylum seekers to the mainland before winter. Since the launch, almost 9,000 asylum seekers have been transferred.

Greece, with the support of the **European Union**, justifies its “containment policy” keeping asylum seekers on the islands because of an **EU-Turkey deal**, designed to curb migration to mainland Europe by returning asylum seekers to Turkey. But Greek appeals courts have blocked most returns of asylum seekers to Turkey, which cannot be considered safe under EU asylum law.

With numbers of arrivals on the islands rising, some EU governments have expressed concern that mainland transfers could encourage greater numbers of people to make the journey. But the migration route onwards to Western Europe through the Western Balkans is largely closed, making Greece a less attractive transit destination.



The Council of State's ruling is an important reminder that migration control concerns cannot justify trapping people in abusive conditions for months on end. As authorities implement the ruling, they should not forget the 15,000 or so who are already stuck on the islands. And **Greece's partners need to share responsibility for managing arrivals** rather than pressing Greece to maintain abusive policies.

	\$50	\$100	
	\$500	\$1,000	Other
	DONATE NOW		










Region / Country Europe/Central Asia, Greece

Topic Refugee Rights, Asylum Seekers, Migrants

MORE READING



March 19, 2018 | Q & A

Why Greece Should #OpenTheIslands



March 19, 2018 | Dispatches

The Stories of Asylum Seekers Trapped in Greece

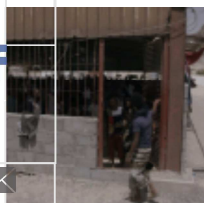
REPORTS



April 20, 2018

“Our Homes Are Not for Strangers”

Mass Evictions of Syrian Refugees by
Lebanese Municipalities



April 17, 2018

Yemen: Detained African Migrants Tortured, Raped

Grant Access to Asylum Procedures; Hold
Abusers Accountable

