

ASsIST - Newsletter No 7 - August 2026

August is **HOLIDAY** month

August is traditionally the holiday month in Greece and across much of Europe, a period when public life slows and many people take a well-earned break. Yet for those seeking asylum and for many refugees, there is no summer pause. Newly arrived individuals continue to encounter serious obstacles in accessing asylum registration procedures. Those already in the asylum system remain caught in prolonged periods of waiting and uncertainty. For refugees who have only recently received protection, the pressing realities of finding accommodation, securing an income and meeting basic daily needs leave little room for rest. The calendar may say holiday season, but for many of the people we support, August is simply another month of navigating an uncertain future.

What's happening in Greece

Arrivals continue via the Aegean islands and the Evros land border, with a far greater number arriving via the longer and more dangerous central Mediterranean route from Libya to Crete.

Arrivals in Greece as of 23 August 2026,

Sea arrivals	17,930	Crete: Sea arrivals	12,144
Land arrivals	5,309	% sea arrivals	67,65%
Total arrivals	23,239	% total arrivals	52,35%

Of the arrivals, 12.5% are children, 8% are women and 79.5% are men.

Between January and June 2026, the nationalities most represented among arrivals were Sudan [3,521], Bangladesh [3,608], Afghanistan [1,280] and Egypt [1076].

Source: [UNHCR](#) accessed 09 August 2026.

Recent developments in Greece continue to highlight the interaction between legal and administrative processes and the practical realities faced by asylum seekers and recognised refugees. While some are evident in the everyday challenges encountered by people moving through different stages of the asylum and refugee process, other changes concern legislation and administrative practice. Two of this edition's feature articles look particularly at where these issues meet everyday life: access to healthcare, and the absence of regular cash assistance for asylum applicants who may have little or no money available to meet essential daily needs. This edition examines these and other developments and their practical implications.

Practical realities of healthcare access in Greece

Actual access to healthcare and medical services often depends on documentation and can become especially difficult when a person moves from asylum-seeker status to recognised protection.

Asylum applicants

Once an asylum application is fully registered, the Asylum Service issues a Temporary Insurance and Healthcare Number for Foreigners—ΠΑΑΥΠΑ or ΠΑΑΥΠΑ— with the asylum applicant's card. The ΠΑΑΥΠΑ permits access without charge to necessary public primary, hospital, pharmaceutical and, where required, psychiatric care. It normally remains active while the asylum applicant's card is valid and should renew automatically with the card.

The important limitation is that ΠΑΑΥΠΑ is generally issued only after full registration of the asylum application. People waiting to register may therefore have a legal entitlement to necessary care but no functioning number with which to obtain ordinary appointments, prescriptions or diagnostic tests. Registration delays can consequently become healthcare delays.

Greek law requires CCAC authorities to ensure access to medical care and psychosocial support. In practice, staffing and service capacity vary considerably between facilities and over time, and some facilities experience periods in which particular services are unavailable or severely limited.

Recognised refugees and people with subsidiary protection

Recognised refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection are legally entitled to healthcare under broadly the same conditions as Greek nationals. However, after recognition, the person must move from ΠΑΑΥΠΑ to the ordinary Greek social-security number, ΑΜΚΑ. The Ministry advises recognised beneficiaries to apply for ΑΜΚΑ within one month of receiving their residence permit; ΠΑΑΥΠΑ is then deactivated.

This transition is one of the most serious weaknesses in the system. Under the current rules, activation of ΑΜΚΑ for third-country nationals requires a valid residence document and proof of actual residence, together with employment-related evidence or one of the limited alternatives provided for by the rules. For recognised refugees who are unemployed or unable to work, this can create a serious barrier to activating ΑΜΚΑ. Delays in obtaining or renewing residence permits, homelessness, inconsistent administrative practice and uncertainty among public officials can leave a recognised refugee with neither active ΠΑΑΥΠΑ nor active ΑΜΚΑ.

A 2026 RSA report documented cases in which recognised refugees with inactive ΑΜΚΑ were denied treatment or medication. In one particularly serious case, a recognised refugee with a chronic illness obtained interim measures from the European Court of Human Rights before her ΑΜΚΑ was eventually activated.

Access to some services and medicines may still involve the same patient contributions that apply to Greek residents. For uninsured patients, medicines, therapeutic procedures and diagnostic examinations generally have to be prescribed by doctors in public hospitals or public primary-healthcare structures rather than by private doctors, subject to certain exceptions.



Practical realities of healthcare access in Greece [cont.]

The main difficulty is the gap between formal entitlement and usable access.

Documentation problems. Missing, inactive or incorrectly recorded PAAYPA or AMKA numbers can prevent electronic prescriptions, appointments, examinations and medication. Renewals of asylum cards and residence permits can also interrupt access.

Language and interpretation. Public hospitals often have limited access to interpreters or cultural mediators. Language was identified as a leading obstacle by asylum applicants, while recognised refugees have also reported problems explaining symptoms, arranging appointments and understanding treatment.

Waiting periods. Public appointments may take weeks or months. Recent reporting describes delays of as much as six months in some cases, with particularly limited access to mental-health services.

Geographical inequality. Access varies significantly between Athens, other mainland regions, islands and remote reception facilities. Specialist services may require travel, creating an additional practical and financial barrier.

Information and digital barriers. Appointments are frequently organised by telephone or online and may require Greek-language navigation, an active social-security number or TAXISnet credentials. UNHCR lists 1535 for public-hospital appointments and 14900 for primary-healthcare units, although availability and language support vary.

Mental-health care. Although PAAYPA and AMKA theoretically cover psychiatric care, shortages of specialists, interpretation and suitable community services significantly restrict practical access.

People without an active PAAYPA or AMKA

Emergency treatment should remain available. Some municipal services and NGOs provide limited medical assistance, referrals or other support, but the services available and eligibility requirements vary. Some municipal medical centres also accept refugees and asylum seekers without PAAYPA or AMKA, depending on the municipality. People living in reception facilities are generally directed to the facility's medical or psychosocial unit, while NGOs continue to fill gaps through clinics, referrals, medicines and interpretation. Some municipal services and NGOs provide limited medical assistance, referrals or other support, but the services available and eligibility requirements vary.

What healthcare is theoretically covered?

The public system may include:

- general and specialist medical consultations;
- hospital and emergency treatment;
- diagnostic examinations;
- prescribed medicines;
- maternity and reproductive healthcare;
- childhood and other public vaccinations;
- psychiatric and mental-health services;
- treatment for chronic illnesses.

Practical realities of healthcare access in Greece [cont.]

Summary: Greek law gives asylum seekers and recognised refugees access to public healthcare. For asylum applicants, access is normally linked to an active PAAYPA; for recognised refugees, to an active AMKA. In practice, delays in registration and residence documents, difficulties issuing or activating social-security numbers, limited interpretation, shortages in the public health system and long waiting times substantially restrict effective access.

Sources

AIDA ECRE : [Asylumineurope.org](https://asylumineurope.org)

Refugee Support Aegean – RSA (rsaegean.org)

UNHCR help.unhcr.org

Cash Assistance: A New Legal Framework, but Payments Still Pending

When will Greece's former Cash Assistance Programme resume?

Since June 2026, the focus now shifts to how and when Greece will implement the monetary daily-expenses allowance required by law, and how applicants will be informed of and able to exercise that right. Regular cash assistance for asylum seekers in Greece ceased to operate normally in 2024, with some limited and irregular payments subsequently made. As of August 2026, there is no public evidence that regular payments to people accommodated in state reception facilities, including CCACs, have restarted. What has changed significantly, however, is the legal framework governing this support.

Law 5307/2026, in force since June 2026, incorporates the new EU Reception Conditions Directive into Greek law. Under Article 17, material reception conditions include accommodation, food, clothing and personal-hygiene products, as well as a daily-expenses allowance intended to provide applicants with a minimum degree of autonomy. The allowance may be provided through different means, but it must include a monetary component. Accommodation, meals or the provision of items such as a hygiene kit therefore cannot in themselves replace it.

Article 33 requires the competent reception authorities to provide material reception conditions to eligible applicants. Under Article 33(8), the authorities retain considerable discretion over how assistance is provided and, particularly where accommodation and meals are supplied in kind, over the level of financial support. However, the legislation does not clearly specify how the monetary component of the daily-expenses allowance should be calculated where material reception conditions are provided wholly or partly in kind.

When will Greece's former Cash Assistance Programme resume? [cont.]

Greece's AMIF 2021–2027 programme includes €6.006 million for a Pact-related “Cash Assistance Programme”. At the AMIF Monitoring Committee meeting on 22 June 2026, Ministry officials said that they were working to reactivate the cash assistance mechanism, having encountered difficulties with the legislative framework. They stated that a new procedure had been developed and acknowledged both the European Commission's repeated reminders and Greece's own awareness of its obligation to provide the assistance.

Article 258 of Law 5307/2026 provides an important indication of what that new procedure involves. It creates a special customer-identification procedure specifically to enable payment of the financial or daily-expenses allowance. Instead of relying on the ordinary eGov-KYC [Know Your Customer] process, credit institutions may complete the required checks using identification and verification data transmitted by the Ministry through ALKYONI II, Greece's unified reception and asylum information system. Before those data can be transmitted, however, a Data Protection Impact Assessment must be completed under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). For payments to begin, the banking interface and an appropriate payment mechanism would also need to be operational. It is not yet publicly clear whether these steps have been completed, which credit institution or institutions will participate, or what form the eventual payment mechanism will take.

The law also creates a remedy when reception conditions are missing or inadequate. Under Article 33(3), an applicant may make a written application for their restoration to the Commander of the relevant RIS Regional Service where they reside. A reasoned decision should be issued within five days. This remedy may be important, but its practical usefulness depends on applicants knowing that it exists and being able to access the procedure.

Article 19 requires the reception authorities to use the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) template, adapted to provide the relevant national information. The EUAA published its new mandatory reception-information templates in June 2026. As of August 2026, ASsIST has been unable to locate a Greece-specific version in the public domain explaining how the new daily-expenses allowance will operate, including its monetary component and the procedures available when reception conditions are missing or inadequate.

The question is therefore no longer simply when the former Cash Assistance Programme will resume. It is how and when Greece will implement the monetary daily-expenses allowance now required by law, and how applicants will be informed of and able to exercise that right.

References

Law 5307/2026, Articles 17, 19, 33(3), 33(8) and 258.

Directive (EU) 2024/1346, Articles 2, 5 and 19.

European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), Your rights and obligations on reception – registration stage (adults), mandatory information template, June 2026.

Ministry of Migration and Asylum, AMIF 2021–2027 Monitoring Committee, 22 June 2026.

AIDA/GCR, Country Report: Greece – Material Reception Conditions, updated July 2026.

Return Hubs: Where Do Proposals Stand?

In Newsletter No. 4, ASsIST examined proposals for “return hubs” outside the European Union, where people whose applications for international protection have been rejected could be transferred pending return to their countries of origin. Since then, political support for the concept has advanced, but significant legal and practical questions remain unresolved.

Greece is among five EU Member States exploring possible arrangements. However, as of August, no host country or signed agreement involving the group has been publicly announced.

A willing third country would be only the first step. Any arrangement would have to comply with international and European legal obligations, including non-refoulement and human-rights safeguards, while also addressing monitoring, accountability, access to legal remedies and responsibility for people transferred outside EU territory.

In July, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Michael O’Flaherty called for prior assessment of human-rights risks, rigorous monitoring, legally enforceable safeguards and effective judicial, parliamentary and public scrutiny of any future arrangements.

Financing also remains unresolved. EU Member States have sought European financial support, but no detailed financing model, credible overall cost estimate or reliable timetable for establishing return hubs has yet emerged.

Political discussion has therefore advanced considerably faster than the practical arrangements required to establish such facilities. ASsIST will continue to monitor developments and revisit the issue if proposals move towards concrete agreements or practical implementation.



Greece and Syria Discuss Migration and Returns



On 9 July, Greek Migration Minister Thanos Plevris met representatives of Syria’s transitional authorities to discuss migration, asylum and possible returns to Syria. Discussions included voluntary return programmes and practical cooperation on the identification of Syrian nationals, travel documents and return procedures.

The meeting did not itself introduce a new return procedure or announce forced returns. It does, however, indicate increasingly practical cooperation between the Greek and Syrian authorities on returns. No subsequent bilateral agreement has yet been announced.

Discussions included voluntary return programmes and practical cooperation on the identification of Syrian nationals, travel documents and return procedures. The Syrian delegation also invited the Minister to Damascus for further discussions.



Switzerland's evolving engagement with Syria.



Switzerland has been expanding its engagement with Syria following the fall of the Assad government in December 2024. At the beginning of 2026, its humanitarian office in Damascus was upgraded to a cooperation office, bringing together the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the FDFA's Peace and Human Rights Division and the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM). Switzerland's wider 2026–2029 programme extends well beyond migration and return, covering humanitarian assistance, education and civil documentation, livelihoods and economic development, climate and water, transitional justice, protection of civilians, peacebuilding and governance. Swiss humanitarian programmes and local partners are also active across several regions of the country.

This increased engagement should not, however, be understood as an assessment that conditions in Syria have normalised. Switzerland itself describes the situation as highly volatile, with continuing uncertainty over the rule of law, protection of minorities and prospects for sustainable peace. SEM also points to difficult economic and humanitarian conditions and states that, for many Syrians, the conditions required for removal are currently not met. It further considers that the circumstances necessary to conclude that recognised refugees no longer require protection have not yet been established.

Since 1 May 2026, SEM has nevertheless resumed decisions on Syrian asylum applications under its ordinary procedures. Its current assessment is that a situation of generalised violence no longer exists throughout the whole country, although significant regional differences remain and individual claims continue to require assessment. Switzerland has also expanded assistance for people choosing voluntarily to return, including an additional CHF 1,000 per person alongside support available through the European Reintegration Programme. Voluntary departures have increased since December 2024 but remain relatively low compared with the Syrian population in Switzerland; figures for the first half of 2026 recorded 46 Syrian departures receiving Swiss return assistance.

Conditions facing people after return remain a significant part of this picture. UNHCR monitoring across all 14 Syrian governorates describes reintegration as fragile and heavily dependent on access to housing, livelihoods and basic services, against a background of economic deterioration and renewed security incidents. SEM itself highlights the loss or destruction of property, unlawful appropriation and difficulties establishing housing, land and property rights, and supports returnees through UN partners with legal assistance and civil documentation.

Switzerland's policies therefore reflect two developments occurring at the same time: greater engagement with Syria and the development of mechanisms supporting voluntary return, alongside continued recognition that humanitarian, economic and security conditions remain precarious and that protection and return decisions require individual assessment. The existence of return assistance should not in itself be taken as evidence that return is safe or sustainable for any particular person.

Sources

State Secretariat for Migration (SEM), Information on Syria, updated 19 August 2026.

Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), Switzerland upgrades its presence in Syria, 9 July 2026.

Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), Swiss Cooperation Programme "Syria and Neighbouring Countries" 2026–2029, 20 May 2026.

State Secretariat for Migration (SEM), Statistics Return Assistance – 1st Semester 2026, 1 August 2026.

UNHCR, Operational Update – Syria, May 2026.



Switzerland's evolving engagement with Syria [cont]

Further Reading

International Rescue Committee, Home, But Not Whole: The Fragile Return and Reintegration of Syrian Returnees, 6 July 2026.

UNHCR, Protection and Reintegration Insights – Syria, Q1 2026.

UNHCR Switzerland, Voluntary Return to Syria, updated 1 May 2026.

European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), Country Guidance: Syria, December 2025.

Greece Calls for Broader EU Emergency Asylum Mechanism

Only weeks after the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum entered into application, Greece has called for an additional EU emergency mechanism that could allow Member States, in exceptional circumstances, to temporarily suspend the submission of asylum applications by newly arrived people.

The proposal was set out by Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis on 4 August, following events at the Spanish enclave of Ceuta, and was subsequently presented by Migration and Asylum Minister Thanos Plevris during an extraordinary meeting of EU interior and migration ministers. Greece argues that additional measures are needed where large-scale arrivals are considered to result from the deliberate “instrumentalisation” of migration by third countries, non-state actors or organised criminal networks. The proposed framework would allow temporary adjustments to normal procedures, including accelerated asylum procedures and returns and, in particularly exceptional circumstances, suspension of the submission of new asylum applications.

The proposal is significant because the EU Pact already includes a mechanism specifically designed for situations of crisis, force majeure and the instrumentalisation of migration. Regulation (EU) 2024/1359, which forms part of the Pact now in application, allows Member States facing a recognised crisis to seek temporary derogations from some normal asylum procedures. These can include extending the period for registering an asylum application to as long as four weeks and modifying aspects of the asylum border procedure.

There is, however, an important distinction. Under the existing Crisis Regulation, a person must still be able to make an application for international protection. Even where registration is delayed, Member States must ensure that applicants can effectively exercise their rights from the time the application is made. The Regulation also states that effective and genuine access to international protection procedures must be maintained.

The Greek proposal therefore appears to go beyond the derogations already provided under the Pact by introducing, under specified emergency conditions, the possibility of temporarily suspending the submission of new asylum applications altogether.

No such additional EU mechanism has been adopted. Following the 4 August meeting, EU ministers agreed on the need to strengthen border management, returns, cooperation with third countries and preparedness for future crises, while further discussions are expected at EU level.

For the moment, the Greek initiative remains a proposal. Its development will be important to follow, particularly because it raises the question of how far Member States may seek to depart from ordinary asylum procedures during situations defined as exceptional emergencies.

Greece Calls for Broader EU Emergency Asylum Mechanism [cont]

Sources

Office of the Prime Minister of the Hellenic Republic (4 August 2026), The EU needs new measures to address the instrumentalisation of migration [article by Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, originally published in Politico].

[The Prime Minister's article.](#)

European Parliament and Council (2024), [Regulation \(EU\) 2024/1359](#) addressing situations of crisis and force majeure in the field of migration and asylum. This is the most important legal source because it shows what the Pact already permits.

European Commission (12 June 2026), New migration and asylum rules enter into application: what is changing? This provides a concise explanation of the now-operative Crisis Regulation and measures addressing instrumentalisation. [European Commission Overview](#)

Council of the European Union (4 August 2026), Informal video conference of home affairs ministers. Useful for establishing what actually emerged from the meeting, rather than what Greece proposed.

[Council meeting conclusions](#)

Further Reading

[European Commission – Pact legislative files in a nutshell](#)

Update on Afghan Returns in Greece

Greece has not resumed removals to Afghanistan. The updated AIDA Country Report on Greece, published in July 2026, records that the Hellenic Police confirmed that returns to Afghanistan have remained halted since 2021. Nevertheless, during 2025, 4,330 detention orders following removal decisions were issued against Afghan nationals, while approximately 300 Afghans remained in pre-removal detention centres at the end of the year. Readmissions from Greece to Türkiye have also remained suspended since March 2020.

AIDA identifies the detention of Afghan nationals as an example of pre-removal detention continuing despite the absence of an actual prospect of return. Refugee Support Aegean has raised the same concern, drawing on official Hellenic Police data. The current position therefore remains contradictory: Greece continues to issue removal decisions and impose administrative detention in some Afghan cases, although there is presently no operational route of return either to Afghanistan or, through readmission, to Türkiye.

Source: ECRE/AIDA, Country Report: Greece – Grounds for detention, updated July 2026.



“Breaking the Continuum of Violence”

[Equal Legal Aid](#), a fellow member of the Legal Aid Network, has recently published [Breaking the Continuum of Violence](#), a substantial new report examining the experiences of people navigating asylum and migration systems and the forms of violence that can continue across different stages of displacement. Drawing on legal analysis and practical experience, the report offers a valuable contribution to understanding how policy and procedure can affect people beyond the point of arrival. We have added the report to the ASsIST Resources page for readers wishing to explore these issues in greater depth.



ASsIST's New Child custody case

An AssIST client and her three children were granted refugee status in Greece in June 2026. The family remains in Malakasa Camp while the mother works to obtain the documentation needed to move forward independently. One particular difficulty concerns her eldest son, aged ten, whose father remains in Egypt but can no longer be located.

The mother previously had custody of her eldest child, but the relevant documents were lost following her arrival in Greece. Without formal documentation confirming custody, she cannot complete the procedures required to obtain a passport or travel document for her son. The situation is different for her two younger children, whose father has agreed to provide the necessary authorisation.

ASsIST is seeking funding through CrowdJustice to cover the legal assistance required to establish or formally document custody of the eldest child. Resolving this issue is an important practical step for the family: formal custody documentation is necessary not only for travel documents, but can also be required when arranging other aspects of life outside the camp. The case illustrates how apparently administrative problems can create significant barriers even after refugee status has been granted.

Campaign launched 22 August:

Goal £1,000

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