

# OUR HOPE

# IS BROKEN

European paralysis leaves  
thousands of refugees  
stranded in Greece



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In 2015, the global refugee crisis moved centre stage in Europe as never before. Uprooted by persecution and conflicts old and new, hundreds of thousands of men, women and children looked to Europe as a place of safety. One year on, following the sealing of successive borders, images of thousands of people trudging through the Balkans have stopped. But the humanitarian crisis has not. Almost 60,000 refugees and migrants are stranded in Greece, the majority in appalling conditions.

Their suffering has inspired thousands of people in Greece and elsewhere to respond. Individuals, groups and NGOs took to the shores of the Greek islands to provide basic humanitarian aid. Others joined the Greek coast guard in rescuing thousands in danger at sea. And many others raised their voices to publicly declare “Refugees Welcome” the length and breadth of Europe.

The solidarity of individuals across Europe stands in stark contrast to the paralysis of Europe’s leaders. The EU is not just far from sheltering a proportionate share of the world’s 21 million refugees; it is also failing in the very manageable task of offering dignity and safety to those that have survived the perilous journey to get there. The urgent need to improve the asylum and reception system in Greece and ensure access to effective protection for those trapped there is a task that falls to the Greek authorities. However, a sustainable solution is possible only if other European states accept a shared responsibility and act accordingly.

Europe, the world’s richest political bloc, has the means and capacity to offer refugees stranded in Greece hope and to live up to its legal and moral commitments. The mechanisms to distribute asylum-seekers across the EU already exist – for example through the EU’s internal relocation programme or through family reunification rules. But EU member states are, for the most part, either stalling or actively resisting efforts to implement them. The result is the immense and avoidable suffering highlighted in this publication.

*Malakasa refugee camp, 40 Km north of Athens. July 2016  
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*Image right: Refugees at a camp in the port area of Thessaloniki, July 2016.  
© Amnesty International (Photo: Richard Burton)*

*Cover image: The Softex refugee camp is located in the industrial area of Sindos, near Thessaloniki. It houses more than 1800 people.  
© Amnesty International (Photo: Richard Burton)*





**EUROPE'S LEADERS CAN ENSURE  
THAT THE THOUSANDS OF REFUGEES  
TRAPPED IN GREECE HAVE THE  
PROTECTION THEY ARE ENTITLED TO.  
THEY NEED TO DO SO URGENTLY.**



# GREECE: WAREHOUSING REFUGEES

***“Maybe we didn’t die in our country but we will do here if we keep living like this.”***

*S., a woman from Syria, Athens*

In March 2016, the Greek border with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (Macedonia) was shut, effectively blocking routes to other European countries. Instead of continuing their onward journey to join their families and pursue their dreams, refugees and asylum-seekers were left with no option but to apply for protection in Greece, amidst a crippling financial crisis, triggering a humanitarian crisis that continues unabated.

According to official figures, more than 47,000 refugees and migrants are stranded in mainland Greece. The majority of them (around 90 per cent) are from war-torn Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. Among them are young children, people with serious health problems, pregnant women and babies. Around 7,500 people are being housed in apartments or hotels but most of them are living in around 50 camps, the majority in appalling conditions, sleeping on floors for months on end. For many, profound insecurity is a constant factor in their daily lives, even down to getting adequate food day to day.

A further 12,500 people have arrived on the shores of Greece after the implementation of the EU-Turkey migration agreement of 18 March 2016. They are stuck on Greek islands in overcrowded camps, living in dreadful conditions while they wait for decisions on their asylum applications.

NGOs, volunteers and activists have tried to plug some of the gaps in humanitarian assistance, but the vast majority of official refugee camps (mostly tented camps or converted warehouses) are not even fit for short-term stay. Refugees interviewed by Amnesty International repeatedly spoke of the shortage of medical care, sanitary facilities and clean drinking water.



© Amnesty International (Photo: Richard Burton)

***“It’s very bad life. The water is very dirty and not enough, for eight people we receive 3 litres per day. We are given food but refugees feel bad; we need to live like humans. There are no toilets in the tents, no medicines, and people start to be upset; we are human beings, not animals.”***

*Basel, a barber from Syria who has been living in Nea Kavala tented camp since February 2016*

Some official camps, like Malakasa and Ritsona, are in remote areas far from hospitals and other services. Most camps were set up without taking into account the needs of vulnerable groups, such as people with disabilities and the elderly.

## LACK OF CARE FOR THOSE MOST IN NEED

Individuals belonging to particularly vulnerable groups are not identified systematically or provided with the specialized services they need, putting them at heightened risk. These include pregnant women, unaccompanied minors, survivors of torture and violence, people with disabilities or chronic illnesses and single mothers.

Following a pre-registration exercise by the Greek Asylum Service that ended in July 2016, 3,481 people were identified as belonging to vulnerable groups in mainland Greece. However, Amnesty International interviewed dozens of people with particular needs who had been pre-registered but remain in unsuitable camps because there is no appropriate alternative accommodation. According to official statistics, there were 1,483 unaccompanied minors in detention or camps across Greece waiting for shelter as of 8 September.

***“Nobody can protect us.  
There are fights but the police  
just look and take pictures.”***

*Salwa, Syrian teacher, living in Softex camp until August*

Appalling conditions and the uncertainty asylum-seekers feel about their future are fuelling tensions that have erupted into violence in a number of camps. The police, usually citing lack of capacity, rarely intervene to ensure their safety or prevent further violence. Amnesty International spoke to dozens of refugees, including young children, who feel unsafe in the camps. Fearing retaliation and knowing that the police are unlikely to intervene, many asylum-seekers are deterred from reporting violence.

Existing camps are particularly unsafe for women and girls. Poor lighting, the lack of safe separate toilets and showers and the absence of mechanisms to report harassment, or protect victims, are longstanding concerns. In July Amnesty International interviewed several Yazidi women in Nea Kavala camp. They had fled attacks by Islamic State (IS) against minority communities across northern Iraq in which women and girls were tortured, raped and subjected to forced marriage or sexual slavery. In the absence of state protection in the camp, the women responded by forming a “protection circle” so that they could accompany each other to the toilet. The reception of asylum-seekers in Greece needs to move beyond providing temporary emergency accommodation. It must urgently adopt an approach that prioritizes access to basic services and that ensures people are not banished to remote and inadequate sites.

***“We don’t feel safe in the camp.  
We don’t use the showers in  
the camp. We have built instead  
a Hammam next to our tents.”***



© Amnesty International (Photo: Richard Burton)





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## THE STORY OF ALAN, GYAN AND THEIR FAMILY

Alan (aged 30) and his sister Gyan (aged 28) are Kurds from Syria. Both are wheelchair users with limited mobility due to a muscle-wasting condition. Their father and a younger sister arrived in Germany in 2015.

Alan, Gyan, two other siblings and their mother arrived in Greece in March 2016. With Greece's border with Macedonia effectively closed to refugees and migrants, they are currently staying in a remote refugee camp on an abandoned military base 60km north of Athens. The camp of closely packed tents and few dilapidated buildings is completely unsuitable for them and they depend on their mother and two siblings for care. Gyan told Amnesty International:

*"In Syria my brother and I used to teach children after school. But we had to stop. We had to escape from the bombs and IS. We spent a year and a half in Iraq but IS was there too and we had to leave. The journey across the mountains to Turkey was very difficult. Due to our disability we*

*had to hire two horses [to transport us]. It was hard. And the sea crossing to Greece from Izmir, Turkey, was so scary. The 'agreement' with the smugglers was to have around 30 people in the boat but in the end we were 60. We had to leave the wheelchairs behind because the smugglers wanted to fill the boat with more people... At one point I asked my brother to throw me in the sea. I couldn't continue any more."*

Alan told Amnesty International that when they finally arrived on the Island of Chios the borders out of Greece had been closed: *"UNHCR told us borders were closed for all cases, no disabled, no pregnant women... no one could cross. All my dreams were broken in that moment."*

The family only managed to pre-register an asylum application with the Greek Asylum Service in July with the aim of initiating a family reunification claim with the German authorities. *"Nobody is telling us what will happen with our cases."* Alan and the rest of the family are grateful to the volunteers and organizations who are supporting them. However, they cannot imagine surviving another winter in the camp, which is completely inadequate for long-term occupation by anyone, let alone people

with special needs. Caring for Gyan and Alan is also taking its toll on other members of the family, including their mother who is struggling with arthritis.

In the meantime, Alan wants to contribute with what he knows best: teaching.

***"I decided to teach English to the kids here. If they want to go to another country they will need the language. They must learn... maybe in the future they will remember they had a teacher called Alan."***



*Three year old Ismail from Afghanistan lives in a tent outside Elliniko old airport in Athens with his family. Children like Ismail spend most of their time outside the building, which is full of health and sanitary hazards. July 2016  
© Giorgos Moutafis/Amnesty International*

*Image above: Around 800 people live in or outside the arrivals hall in the old airport in Elliniko in Athens. July 2016  
© Giorgos Moutafis/Amnesty International*



# LIVES ON HOLD: EUROPE'S EMPTY PROMISES

## EMERGENCY RELOCATION: URGENT AND NECESSARY

***“EU leaders keep saying they want to act humanely, but they make the process [relocation] very slow and they do not care how we live here.”***

*Soushi, a Yazidi woman from Iraq*

In late September 2015, EU member states agreed on a temporary scheme to distribute responsibility for receiving asylum-seekers more evenly between European countries. They established a two-year emergency relocation mechanism to relieve the pressure on frontline states hosting large numbers of people in need of international protection. In the case of Greece, the final commitment by other EU member states was to take in 66,400 asylum-seekers, divided between them according to pre-set quotas.

However, the promised effort to relocate asylum-seekers from temporary shelters in Greece to more permanent homes in other European countries has so far largely failed to materialize. The numbers speak for themselves. As of 14 September 2016, only 3,734 asylum-seekers have left Greece for other European countries, while the total number of places pledged as of 30 August 2016 was a mere 7,106.

The EU relocation programme is an important mechanism for alleviating the pressure on Greece and for many asylum-seekers it is the only way they can get protection in other European countries. But a series of obstacles, mainly political, are blocking relocation and putting thousands of lives on hold.

According to data from the EU Commission, most European states are submitting far fewer pledges than their allocated quotas. Austria, Hungary and Poland have not relocated any asylum-seekers under the emergency programme. Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Croatia, Germany, Slovakia and Spain have relocated less than 5% of the people they pledged to assist back in 2015.

Although the Greek Asylum Service could do with more resources it is the receiving European states that are largely responsible for delays in responding to relocation requests. As of 31 July, the Greek Asylum Service had received around 10,000 applications. The EU Commission has repeatedly called on states to respond to relocation requests within two weeks. However, this is still not happening and applicants can wait up to four months between the relocation request and the actual transfer. This inevitably results in frustration and undermines confidence in the programme, contributing significantly to the relatively low numbers that have applied to date.

Only asylum-seekers fleeing countries from where asylum applications achieve an EU-wide average recognition rate of at least 75% are eligible for relocation. This is reviewed every three months and eligible nationalities can change. At present the threshold covers mainly Syrian asylum-seekers, who are the majority of those stranded in Greece. Iraqis have been excluded since July 2016 and Afghan nationals, who make up the second largest group in Greece, have never been part of the relocation scheme. This has fostered a feeling of unfairness among groups excluded from the programme.

The general lack of political will on the part of many states to relocate asylum-seekers is perhaps most starkly illustrated by their response to one of the most vulnerable groups: unaccompanied minors. Between June and July 2016 the Greek authorities identified 1,225 unaccompanied children on mainland Greece. Not all are eligible for relocation due to their nationality or because they have pending family reunification claims. However, the number of unaccompanied minors relocated under the emergency scheme is extremely low; only 42 children have been relocated in Europe, most of them to Finland.





19 year old Farah fled Syria when he was 18. He wants to study IT but is stuck in Ritzona camp in Greece. July 2016.  
© Giorgos Moutafis/Amnesty International

Image below: Yezidi women have survived brutal abuses by IS, travelled thousands of miles to escape, but now find themselves overlooked by European leaders. July 2016.  
© Amnesty International (Photo: Richard Burton)





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## YEHIA AND WALAA: DRAGGING OUT

Yehia (aged 29) and Walaa (aged 23) are students from Syria. They have two small daughters, Sara and Fatima. Walaa's brother survived a deadly shipwreck in Lampedusa in October 2013 and he has been granted temporary protection status in Malta. Walaa's other siblings and parents are in Germany. The couple fled to Turkey in 2014 and their eldest daughter, Sara, was born there.

*"We got married during the war in a place underground... On our wedding day, there was a large explosion in front of our house. Our neighbour's home and my uncle's home were blown up."*

Walaa was six months pregnant when the couple arrived on the Greek island of Lesbos in late February 2016. They moved on to the mainland and ended up in an informal refugee camp next to the EKKO petrol station (known as EKKO camp) near the town of Polykastro in northern Greece for three months.

*"Conditions were really difficult. When it rained, water was coming in to our tent... Sara [suffered chest infections] and she is still ill... Two days she is well and two days she is not... We slept in the tent and the tent would fly away because of the wind."*

Following several attempts to apply for the relocation scheme with the Greek Asylum Service, the couple had their first interview in late April 2016. Despite Walaa's advanced pregnancy and health problems, they were not offered any other shelter.

Yehia, Walaa and Sara remained in the EKKO camp until late May when a Greek couple offered the family a flat to stay in Thessaloniki. Fatima was born in Thessaloniki in mid-June 2016, the day the authorities evicted more than 1,800 people from the EKKO camp.

The family travelled to Athens to have an interview with officials at the French Embassy in late June and were relocated to France in late August 2016.

Walaa described her feelings about the new chapter in their lives:

***"I am happy but I also feel sad because of all these poor people still [stranded] in Greece. I want a good and peaceful life for my girls."***



## TOTAL PLEDGED & ACHIEVED

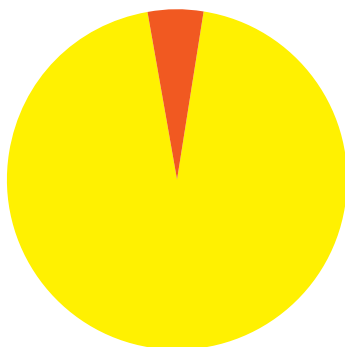


**PLEDGED  
66,400  
IN TWO YEARS**



**3,734  
RELOCATIONS  
IN FIRST YEAR**

**5.6%  
RELOCATED**



## TOTAL RELOCATIONS BY EUROPEAN STATES AS OF 14 SEPTEMBER 2016

	PLACES PLEDGED	RELOCATED FROM GREECE	%
AUSTRIA	1491	0	0
BELGIUM	2415	118	4.8
BULGARIA	831	6	0.7
CROATIA	594	10	1.6
CYPRUS	181	42	23
CZECH REPUBLIC	1655	12	0.7
ESTONIA	204	49	24
FINLAND	1299	419	32
FRANCE	12599	1431	11
GERMANY	17209	195	1
HUNGARY	988	0	0
IRELAND	240	69	28
LATVIA	295	55	18
LITHUANIA	420	77	18
LUXEMBURG	309	104	33
MALTA	78	24	30
NETHERLANDS	3797	439	11
POLAND	4321	0	0
PORTUGAL	1778	323	18
ROMANIA	2572	147	5
SLOVAKIA	652	3	0.4
SLOVENIA	349	60	17
SPAIN	6647	151	2
SWEDEN	2378	0	0

Source: EU Commission

\* Switzerland, Iceland and Norway have voluntarily joined the mechanism. No relocation from Greece so far.

\* Sweden has a temporary suspension on its obligations under the relocation mechanism.

\* In March, Austria was granted a temporary partial suspension.



© Jean Marc Viret

## KARAM'S STORY: SAFE AT LAST

Karam was studying to be a doctor in Syria when the war started. He really wanted to finish his studies and stayed in Deir ez Zur even though the city was under siege. He combined his studies with a job with the Red Crescent.

In January 2015, just after graduating, he fled with his wife, two children and his mother. He told Amnesty International: *"You were walking in the street and all you could think is that anytime a bomb can kill you."*

They fled first to Turkey and then decided to travel to Europe. Initially they wanted to go to Germany because Karam's younger brother was already there. But when they arrived in Greece they decided to apply for relocation even though that meant they could not choose their country of destination.

*"My mother is not a young woman, she has diabetes and hypertension, my wife was pregnant, I have a daughter, I couldn't support them on my own... We were waiting for the result, which country would choose us. During this time, a month and 10 days exactly, I was a volunteer in the port of [Piraeus] in Athens. About 10 or 15 days after I registered for the relocation programme, the border was closed. So there were a lot of refugees stuck in the port in Athens and in Idomeni at the border. I was a volunteer at the port... After that I worked with a clinic for an association in Greece."*

Karam and his family were lucky. They applied when the borders were still open and there was less interest in the relocation programme, the process was faster. They were relocated to France where they have been living for four months.

Karam's mother applied for family reunification to join her younger son in Germany and after a long wait her request was accepted.

***"We have a safe life now, this is number one. You can't imagine, before the war we were safe. Safety is something you can't touch but you will feel it when they take it away from you."***



## K. A.'S STORY: LOSING HOPE

K. A. is a lawyer from Syria. He left the country with his son, daughter-in-law and two grandsons aged nine and four.

*“In Syria I worked helping political prisoners. Three colleagues of mine – also lawyers – have been arrested and disappeared. When my house was destroyed in Damascus because of the bombs I moved to Raqqa. But IS was there. I was afraid I would be arrested because of my profession and because I’m not religious. I hid for a year. And later, I felt I didn’t have any choice but to leave Syria.”*

In September, the family fled to Turkey. By this time his daughter-in-law was heavily pregnant and unable to continue the journey. So K.’s son went on ahead and reached Germany, hoping that the family would be reunited later. But this never happened.

On 18 February, the family, including the 20-day-old baby girl born in Turkey, managed to cross the Aegean and arrived in Greece. The family went to Athens and then took a bus to the village of Idomeni, close to the northern border with Macedonia, where at that time an informal transit camp supported by NGOs and volunteers. As the Western Balkans route was open to Syrians at the time, K. thought it was just a matter of days before they would be reunited with his son in Germany.

*“When we arrived in Idomeni it was raining. We had to sleep rough. Everything was chaos and very messy. And suddenly I started to feel unwell. I spent 10 days in hospital. When I was discharged they [the Macedonian police] had shut the border for everyone and we were trapped. We stayed there for a month and a half.”*

K. and his family are living in Skaramagas, a refugee camp on the outskirts of Athens. Conditions have improved slightly for them because they can sleep in a caravan, away from the mud of Idomeni, but the future remains uncertain. K. has tried for months to contact the Greek Asylum Service. He only managed to get through to register on 5 July.

***“ I know I cannot apply for family reunification to join with the rest of the family. I will do relocation. I don’t know where I will go. But I have no dreams, no hopes anymore. I’m tired and frustrated.”***



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***“Every day we die  
100 times; the air is  
no good here, the  
food is not good,  
there is infection  
here. Even animals  
could not live here.”***

*26 year old Yousif Ajaj from Syria in the  
Softex refugee camp. July 2016*

## FAMILIES SEPARATED FOR TOO LONG

***“We have been apart for too long. Every time I speak to my husband my children cry.”***

*Nadja, Syrian refugee, Skaramagas, near Athens*

Staying together as a family is vital for refugees trying to rebuild their lives. However, asylum-seekers with close relatives in other parts of Europe – mainly Germany – have found themselves trapped in Greece for months on end amid growing fears that they will not be able to reunite with their loved ones anytime soon. The consequences on the physical and mental wellbeing of children and heads of households are immense. Amnesty International found individuals experiencing prolonged family separation who were suffering not only from the trauma of the war, but also from acute stress, anxiety and depression.

***“My 14-year-old son arrived in Germany in October 2015. I’m scared for him, I cannot stay here.”***

*Salwa, a Syrian teacher living in Softex camp*

Under EU legislation (the Dublin Regulation) EU member states are only required to recognize the nuclear family as eligible for family reunification. For refugees stranded in Greece, this means that family reunification should be available to parents travelling alone or with their children wishing to reunite with their spouses; to parents with minors in EU countries; and to unaccompanied minors with relatives in the EU. However, systemic problems in accessing the asylum procedure in Greece and insufficient resources to process applications for family reunification in Greece and in receiving countries pose major obstacles. As a result, families have been separated for months and many still do not have clarity on when they will be able to be together again.

In July 2016 Amnesty International interviewed asylum-seekers who were waiting for a text message from the Greek Asylum Service notifying them of their appointment to lodge an asylum claim and request family reunification. They had no information about the process. While a few hundred had been given an appointment for September, for many others the uncertainty and waiting remains.

Recent restrictions to family reunification for beneficiaries of subsidiary protection in some European countries are also likely to hamper family reunion. Lack of information adapted to the complex realities of families constituted and separated during conflict and flight, coupled with unreasonable documentation requirements, can result in long delays or even cause insurmountable obstacles.

According to EU rules, European governments could offer accessible and fast track family reunification procedures through their diplomatic representatives in Greece. For example, the German Embassy in Greece has a process whereby people with refugee status in Germany can apply for family reunification visas. For Syrian families the Embassy has introduced a “simplified procedure”. But this too has been problematic; in July 2016 Amnesty International interviewed refugees who had been given appointments for 2017.

## VISAS TO ENSURE A REGULAR WAY FORWARD

The current backlog of asylum-applications in Greece means many asylum-seekers cannot get a prompt resolution to their situation inside the country. Their chances of continuing their journey to another European country in search of protection are also extremely limited. For some, they are almost non-existent, because they do not have all the documents necessary to get a normal travel visa.

However, European states can exercise flexibility and waive visa requirements. Embassies and consulates in Greece could issue humanitarian visas to allow asylum-seekers to travel safely and regularly to other European countries where they could apply for asylum. They could offer vulnerable asylum-seekers, for example those with urgent medical needs, a humanitarian visa so they can receive adequate medical care.

European states can also grant work and student visas through their consular services in Greece. For some nationalities not eligible for relocation or for individuals without family members in other European countries, this could be the only safe and regular way out of Greece.

These are all options that European leaders have before them. What is lacking is the political will to offer these safe and legal routes out of Greece to people whose options are shrinking fast.





© Amnesty International (Photo: Richard Burton)

## FIRIAL'S STORY

Firial (aged 33) is from Aleppo and is stranded in Greece with her two daughters. Her husband, who is seriously ill, is in Germany along with their two sons.

*"I stayed in Aleppo, moving from place to place for four years. My house was destroyed, my dad, my sister, my mum and my husband's mum, all of them died because of the bombs. We moved out after my husband's heart attack.*

*I went to Turkey in May 2015... My husband couldn't work as he was in the hospital; he spent 10-15 days at the hospital, and then he came back, and again 10-15 days... I saved money to send my husband to Germany. My husband left Turkey in mid-November and arrived in Germany in four days with our two sons."*

On 1 February [2016] she arrived in Chios. Then she went to Athens, from there to Thessaloniki and then to the EKKO camp. From there she walked to Idomeni where she spent four months.

*"When the border closed, I became stressed... Men came to the tents to ask me if I was married or divorced. One day, I went to MSF... I saw doctor, who said I had depression and gave me some tablets.*

*I have an appointment with the German embassy on 10 January 2017. They have told me that if I have a passport they can help, but I don't have a passport. I couldn't take the passports... I cannot make a passport, it will cost 600-700 euros..."*

***"I suffered a lot.  
I lost my house.  
I went to Turkey.  
My children lost so  
much time out of  
school. I don't know  
when I will get to  
Germany.  
This is killing me."***



## AFGHANS RUNNING OUT OF OPTIONS: ZALASHT'S STORY

Zalasht from Kabul is stranded with her four children in a refugee camp in Malakasa. When a bomb killed her husband in Afghanistan four years ago, her worst nightmare was that the same could happen to her children. She sold her house and put their lives in the hands of smugglers to reach Europe. She arrived on Chios in February 2016 and then travelled to the port of Piraeus in Athens and later to Malakasa.

*"We were part of the first group of refugees coming to this camp. I was so scared. We didn't know where they were taking us. We were told that conditions were better than in [the port of Piraeus] but it was not true. At the beginning there was only one toilet for 500 people and we couldn't have a shower for a month."*

Afghans are not eligible for the relocation emergency programme. Zalasht has no close family in Europe and so cannot apply for family reunification. Her only option is to apply for asylum and remain in Greece. But this is not an appealing prospect considering the shortcomings of Greece's asylum service and current reception conditions in the country.

*"This place is full of snakes and when it rains the water comes inside the tent. At night it's very dark. We only have a torch that we have to share among the five of us. If I have to accompany one of my kids to the toilet, the rest are left in complete darkness inside. The other day one of my daughters just tripped over because it was dark and could not see the rope of the tent. She had to be taken to hospital. Her nose was broken."*

Zalasht only wishes for a better and safer future for her children:

***"My children are not safe in Afghanistan. Even to go to school was dangerous."***



# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Nearly 60,000 refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants who arrived in Greece in 2015 and 2016 are trapped there in squalor. The humanitarian crisis these men, women and children are facing in Greece is a glaring example of the collective failure of European governments to live up to their promise to share responsibility and provide protection for these refugees.

This humanitarian crisis is of European leaders' own making but can be solved if there is political will. The solutions – such as relocation, family reunification and visas – are there. Unless Greece and its European partners act urgently to improve the conditions, share responsibility and offer a safe place to the thousands of people trapped in Greece, this will become a long-term tragedy.

Ordinary people across the continent have opened their arms, even their homes, and have shown solidarity with some of the world's most vulnerable people that have risked life and limb searching for safety in Europe.

***Now it is time for European governments to stop looking away and live up to their legal and moral obligations.***



*Sarif an elderly and blind Yezidi refugee from Iraq. Her family told Amnesty International that she is over 100 years-old. Sarif stays in a tent at the Nea Kavala camp with one of her sons, his wife and their five children.  
© Amnesty International (Photo: Richard Burton)*

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO EUROPEAN GOVERNMENTS

### EU RELOCATION

- Increase the number of pledged relocation places in line with current needs in Greece;
- Expedite the relocation process by swiftly accepting relocation requests, without imposing restrictive criteria, and ensure prompt admissions;
- Widen the scope of the programme to all asylum-seekers.

### FAMILY REUNIFICATION

- Establish accessible, public and fast-track family reunification procedures to ensure the swift reunion of family members stranded in Greece with close relatives in other European countries;

- Issue one-way permits (laissez-passer) to family members who are unable to obtain national travel documents;
- Apply a flexible definition of family and consider wider family relations, including individuals not biologically related, using the criterion of dependency;
- Allow family members to be reunited not only with relatives who have refugee status, but also with family members granted subsidiary protection in receiving countries.

### VISAS

- Grant access, for example, through humanitarian visas for asylum-seekers in immediate need of special care;
- Provide other pathways of admission that can also benefit asylum-seekers stranded in Greece.

### TO THE GREEK GOVERNMENT

- Provide suitable accommodation, with the support of the EU, including alternatives to camps; use options such as containers and tents only as a last resort; and guarantee that emergency accommodation offers adequate and separate sanitary facilities for men and women and appropriate medical care;
- Ensure that all vulnerable groups, including pregnant women, children, the elderly and people with disabilities or chronic illnesses, have access to appropriate services and care;
- Ensure the safety and security of refugees in the camps and elsewhere and effective access to justice.



*Noura is 6 years old. She is from Syria. She is stuck in Greece with her mother, two brothers and one sister. The family is waiting to reunite with the father in Germany.*  
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