

Urgent appeal for the evacuation of the Greek refugee camps

President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen

President of the European Parliament, David Sassoli

President of the European Council, Charles Michel

Prime Minister of the Hellenic Republic, Kyriakos Mitsotakis

We urge the immediate evacuation of the refugee camps and hotspots on the Greek islands to avert a catastrophe amidst the coronavirus pandemic.

More than 42,000 people are trapped on the islands in hopelessly overcrowded camps and in horrific conditions. Recommended measures like social distancing or frequent hand washing are simply impossible. There is no hope of containing any outbreak within the camps. It would endanger the elderly and those with underlying health conditions, both refugees and the local population.

Time is of the essence. We urge emergency action to guarantee the health and safety of the asylum seekers, the local population and the humanitarian aid workers on the islands. The European Commission, the European Council and the European Parliament must make every effort to urge member states to fulfil their responsibilities and accept asylum seekers from Greece.

We demand that access to the universal human right to seek and be granted asylum, as guaranteed by the European Charter of Fundamental Rights, should immediately be restored and upheld. This includes accepting asylum applications and considering them in fair asylum procedures, not punishing people who cross borders in order to make an asylum application, and fully respecting the principle of non-refoulement, which is currently being circumvented by illegal pushbacks.

We, the undersigned civil society organisations are confident, given our long experience in caring for and advising refugees, that it is well within the EU's capacity to cope with the current crisis on its external borders. We stand in solidarity with the refugees and offer our help to avoid this looming humanitarian catastrophe.