

Turkey was designated as a 'safe third country' for Syrians refugees in the 2016 [EU-Turkey Deal](#). Nationalities for which Turkey was deemed 'safe' was widened to include refugees from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Somalia in the [Joint Ministerial Decision](#) by the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Migration and Asylum published on the 7th June 2021.

In issuing this decision, Greece declared that nationals of those five countries that had passed through Turkey before claiming asylum in Greece could have their claim in Greece dismissed. The argument being that they could have applied for and received protection and safety in Turkey. Needless to say, this argument is untenable.

On 16th November, [three young Syrians](#) — Ahmed al-Ali (21 years), Mohammed al-Bish (17 years) and Mamoun al-Nabhan (23 years) — were burnt to death in a racist attack in the Aegean province of Izmir, Turkey. The details of the incident have only just come to light, [35 days after](#) the three young men died, and there has been little media coverage of the incident. It is understood that a nationalist Turkish citizen poured gasoline on the three teenagers as they were sleeping at a factory manufacturing stones for the sidewalk.

This piece of writing highlights that such racism, fear and discrimination is a common experience for Syrian refugees living in Turkey — stressing that Turkey is not a safe country for the Syrian population. [Amnesty](#) has been reporting that people on the move encounter violence from Turkish and Greek authorities at the border. Testimonies taken from organisations, such as [Border Violence Monitoring Network](#), confirm that the border security policies implemented between Turkey and Greece have been violating individuals on the move for many years. [In a single week this month](#), at least 30 people died whilst trying to seek safety in [three shipwrecks](#) on the Aegean Sea. The deaths at the border of Turkey and Greece are a systemic result of hostile border policies - there are [hundreds of unidentified migrants](#) buried in a cemetery in Sidiro, a small Greek village a few miles from the Turkish border.

On Samos, many Syrian asylum seekers have been stuck in a 'legal limbo' as their asylum claim is almost always systematically considered inadmissible and are due to be deported back to Turkey. However, Turkey has not been receiving people since at least March 2020. Such individuals are unable to see their right to asylum examined in Greece, be readmitted to Turkey under the EU-Turkey Deal or voluntarily return to their home country as IOM [does not support](#) voluntary returns to Syria. Furthermore, these individuals are unable to file a second subsequent application owing to the unexplained absence of the system to collect the related administrative fees. People with rejections to their asylum applications are also unable to work, claim cash assistance or access essential services as they are now considered to no longer be in the asylum system.

The cumulative result of all of this on the concerned individuals is unwarranted and indefinite detention, the worrying neglect of basic civil liberties and a complete lack of real legally-founded alternative solutions or support from the state or the EU. Last year, a report titled '[A Crime of Survival](#)' was published as a result of the research conducted amongst the Syrian nationals

resident in the previous Vathy refugee camp. The authors of the report, themselves individuals claiming asylum in Samos, collected their research in the form of a questionnaire answered by Syrian nationals residing in the so-called 'Jungle' of Vathy camp. The report highlighted the collective experiences of poor mental health and lack of access to information amongst the respondents and the wider Syrian community. Furthermore, in September 2020, a group of Syrian men published a [letter addressed to the camp authorities](#) asking for their freedom.

*"We do not know what is our fate, nor why we are being treated like criminals despite not having committed any sin. All we did was flee our country, refusing to die. All we want is a life in safety and dignity, as every human desires. [...]"*

*Please do not neglect us! We suffer badly! Having been condemned to idleness for over two years, we are driving crazy, depressive. Our minds are devoured by mental illness, we lose ourselves. [...]"*

*Please do not ignore this, please help us. We would like to discuss the problems and suffering we face with the camp authorities, so that a solution will be found and over two years of suffering may end."*

People's lives have been put on hold, as they are forced to wait for a response from a system that is broken, a system that does not listen to the realities people face but instead makes assumptions about an individual's safety in a country based only on knowing their nationality.

The system is broken, and the voices of the Syrian community living in Samos reminds us just how broken.