

NGOs welcome the resumption of cash assistance for asylum-seekers in Greece, call for gaps to be urgently filled

The months-long suspension of cash assistance for asylum-seekers since October 2021 has caused significant hardship across Greece. Today 14 NGOs and civil society organisations welcome the restoration of programme, while warning that many individuals still remain without assistance.

Since the end of December, asylum-seekers in Greece have been receiving ‘cash cards’ as part of an agreement between the Greek government and Catholic Relief Services (CRS). According to the Greek Ministry of Migration and Asylum, cards have been distributed to all eligible asylum-seekers. In January, overdue payments for October and November were made, with the expectation that disbursements will resume functioning normally at the beginning of March. The new distribution system is based on information from the Greek Asylum Service (GAS) database, and all registered asylum-seekers are entitled to cash assistance until a final decision on their asylum application is delivered.

While welcoming the restart of the programme, NGOs expressed serious concern that many asylum-seekers still do not have access to this assistance. Significant numbers of eligible asylum seekers on the islands of Lesbos and Samos reported to NGOs that they are not receiving cash. Some asylum-seekers who were eligible for cash assistance between October and December 2021, when payments were discontinued, have since then received a final positive or negative decision on their application for international protection and no longer qualify for such assistance. As a result, they are no longer considered eligible for a cash card and thus have not received back payments owed to them. In addition, asylum seekers who reside in camps on the mainland and are provided with food receive a reduced amount of cash compared to what they were receiving before the suspension of the programme, which could limit their ability to meet their food and other needs as they think best. Asylum-seekers in Ritsona camp in central Greece who were not present for the initial cash card distribution have also been excluded from receiving November and December’s missed payments.

NGOs are calling the Greek Government to ensure that all those who are eligible receive the full amount of cash assistance, including overdue payments to those who were eligible between October and December 2021.

Background

- After it was handed over from UNHCR to the Greek Government from October 2021, the programme for the distribution of cash-assistance to asylum-seekers in Greece abruptly stopped;
- In October 2021, a press release (see [here](#)) and an open letter (see [here](#)) were published by NGOs raising the alarm over the disruptions to cash assistance;
- On 18 November 2021, the Greek government signed an agreement with the Catholic Relief Services (CRS), where the organisation would implement the cash assistance programme (see [here](#));
- On 25 November 27 NGOs raised alarm at the growing impacts the halt to cash assistance was having on asylum seekers (see [here](#)).

Signatures

1. Amnesty International
2. Arsis - Association for the Social Support of Youth
3. Changemakers Lab
4. ECHO100PLUS
5. Europe Must Act
6. Jesuit Refugee Service Greece (JRS Greece)
7. Lesvos Solidarity
8. Lighthouse Relief
9. Refugee Legal Support (RLS)
10. Samos Advocacy Collective
11. Samos Volunteers
12. Save the Children
13. Second Tree
14. Still I Rise