

ASYLUM



OVERVIEW OF THE STATE OF ASYLUM IN 2024 AND 2025

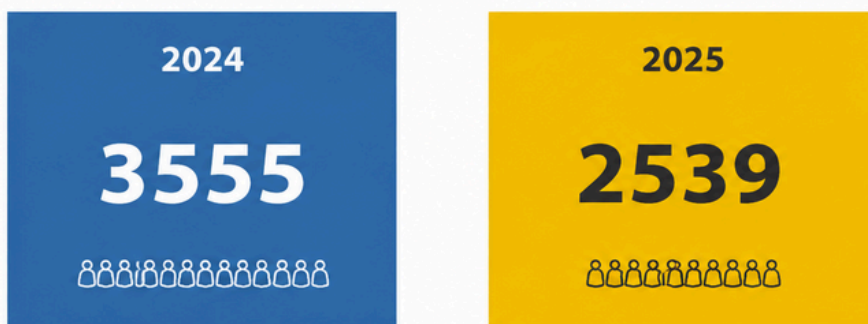
Macedonian Young Lawyers Association (MYLA)



GENERAL OPERATIONS AND SUPPORT

LEGAL AID FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS

MYLA • 2024-2025



MYLA has been providing free legal aid and representation to asylum seekers and persons under international protection for more than 14 years, in cooperation with UNHCR.

In 2024, MYLA provided 3,555 legal counselling services, while in 2025 it provided 2,539 legal counselling services and assistance to asylum seekers, persons under international protection, people on the move, and others. Legal aid includes counselling, mediation, legal representation, and support related to status determination, rights, integration, and employment.

MYLA ensured daily presence in the Vinojug and Tabanovce transit centres, as well as in the Reception Centre for Asylum Seekers in Skopje, and maintained a twice-weekly presence in the Reception Centre for Foreigners.

THE STATE OF ASYLUM IN NORTH MACEDONIA

North Macedonia is a **transit point on the Balkan route**; Vinojug Transit Centre in the south and Tabanovce Transit Centre in the north functioning as short-term accommodation facilities where people usually stay for only a few days.

In Vinojug, people on the move most often leave the centre immediately, while in the Tabanovce Transit Centre they stay on average for two to three days. The transit centres still do not have a formally regulated status, nor is the status of the people accommodated there. **In 2024 and 2025 people on the move in Vinojug were no longer returned to Greece by the police**, but instead left the centre independently towards Greece or submitted asylum applications in North Macedonia

At the Tabanovce Transit Centre, several incidents were recorded involving people on the move who had been forcibly returned by the Serbian police in a violent and degrading manner.



FRONTEX (the European Border and Coast Guard Agency) FRONTEX began its operations at the southern border in April 2023 and continued its presence throughout 2024 and 2025. FRONTEX officers are also present at Skopje International Airport, as well as at the border crossings with Greece and Serbia. Their presence contributed to improved profiling of people on the move and more efficient referral to competent institutions and organisations.

Regarding the **asylum procedure**, although the law provides for an individual and thorough assessment of the fear of persecution and the risk of serious harm, significant shortcomings remain in practice. Interviews are often reduced to formal questioning focused on irrelevant aspects (such as the journey itself), rather than on the substantive reasons for seeking protection. Decision reasoning is frequently limited and lacks a comprehensive analysis of country of origin information, while access to effective communication with the authorities remains restricted.

Therefore, despite the existence of a legal framework, the asylum procedure requires substantial improvement in order to ensure a genuine, high-quality, and individualised assessment of the need for international protection.

THE STATE OF ASYLUM IN NORTH MACEDONIA

Since the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis in February 2022, North Macedonia did not grant temporary protection until August 2023. Ukrainian refugees under temporary protection have had limited access to healthcare rights, while Ukrainians residing on temporary stay for humanitarian reasons have had almost no access to rights at all.

In 2024, the issue concerning personal identification numbers for Ukrainian refugees under temporary protection was resolved through amendments to the legislation. However, throughout both 2024 and 2025, they continued to enjoy only minimal rights, excluding access to healthcare and social protection.

In 2024 and 2025, **support for refugees remaining in North Macedonia from the Kosovo crisis continued**. MYLA proposed legislative amendments aimed at regulating their residence status, which were subsequently adopted by the Parliament. These amendments enabled access to permanent residence for the remaining 150 persons residing in the country.


By the end of 2025, **70 persons had been granted permanent residence, while the remaining applicants were either rejected, with MYLA submitting appeals against the negative decisions or were still awaiting the outcome of the procedure.**




THE STATE OF ASYLUM IN NORTH MACEDONIA



Asylum



In 2024, the Minister of Justice adopted the Guide for the Provision of State-Funded Free Legal Aid to Asylum Seekers. The process of developing and adopting this guide, which serves as a practical tool for institutions, was led by MYLA over a period of more than five years. The guide facilitates procedures and communication between the Asylum Sector within the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Justice, and the lawyers providing free legal aid. The system became formally operational in 2025.



MYLA submitted five requests for free legal aid on behalf of asylum seekers, and lawyers were appointed to represent them in proceedings before the administrative courts following negative decisions issued by the Asylum Sector. Nevertheless, **there is still room for improvement in communication between institutions and in the speed of implementation of the lawyer appointment procedure.**



Towards the end of 2025 **the Ministry of Interior began engaging and paying translators/interpreters for interviews with asylum seekers,** thereby starting to assume responsibility for the provision of interpretation services within the asylum procedure. Until then, these processes had been supported exclusively by international organisations.



THE STATE OF ASYLUM IN NORTH MACEDONIA

Starting from 2025, **the management of the Reception Centre for Foreigners decided that unaccompanied children would no longer be detained as witnesses in proceedings against smugglers.** This commitment was respected throughout the year, although it does not constitute a formal solution prescribed by a bylaw or legislation. The duration of detention for witnesses in such proceedings was significantly shorter compared to previous years, and in some cases individuals were taken directly before the Public Prosecutor's Office without being accommodated in the centre at all. However, persons detained in the centre still do not have access to legal aid regarding the detention itself, while access to the asylum procedure is granted only after they testify before the authorities or once the proceedings for which they were detained are concluded.

In 2024, **the Administrative Court issued, for the first time, a positive merits-based decision in an asylum case, granting protection to an asylum seeker.** Although the Higher Administrative Court later overturned the decision, the very act of deciding on the merits and granting protection by the court represented a significant step towards the consistent application of legal obligations and the establishment of positive judicial practice in the field of asylum.

In 2024, MYLA, together with the Bar Association, and in 2025 together with the Bar Association and additionally the Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors, implemented **training on refugee law for lawyers and judges in accordance with the refugee law module** developed in cooperation with the Bar Association of the Republic of North Macedonia and the International Institute of Humanitarian Law – Sanremo, through a process supported by MYLA and UNHCR.

KEY ISSUES AND CHALLENGES



Asylum seekers are unable to work due to administrative obstacles, primarily because they are not assigned personal identification numbers.

The Asylum Sector rarely maintains a direct presence at the Reception Centre for Asylum Seekers, which leads to delays in the asylum procedure and in the exercise of certain rights of asylum seekers, such as the timely issuance or renewal of identification documents, provision of information regarding the asylum procedure, conducting interviews with asylum seekers, and similar matters.

Identification documents issued to asylum seekers and persons with refugee status are still not biometric documents.

The practice of requiring asylum seekers to obtain a medical certificate as a precondition for admission to the Reception Centre for Asylum Seekers remains problematic, even though such a requirement cannot always realistically be fulfilled. The requirement to possess a medical certificate is prescribed in the Rulebook on the Reception of Asylum Seekers. This particularly affects cases where individuals independently submit an asylum application at a police station, after which the police, instead of directly transferring them to the centre, in some cases transport them between different healthcare institutions in an attempt to obtain the required medical certificate.

Additionally, not all doctors issue certificates to persons without identity documents, which is most often the case for people on the move, further complicating access to the asylum procedure. In practice, in some cases, asylum seekers were turned away from the Reception Centre until they obtained such a certificate, thereby creating an unnecessary barrier to effective access to protection. Towards the end of the year, some police stations also refused to accept asylum applications until applicants obtained the medical certificate, without which they would not have been admitted to the centre.

Nevertheless, in some cases asylum seekers were admitted to the centre and the doctor present at the Reception Centre immediately conducted the medical examination as a substitute for the examination that would otherwise have been required prior to admission. Asylum seekers who submit applications in the Tabanovce Transit Centre, Vinojug, or the Reception Centre for Foreigners do not face these challenges, as these centres have doctors who conduct the examination before individuals are transferred to the Reception Centre for Asylum Seekers.

Children on the move and unaccompanied children continue to be accommodated in unsuitable facilities, highlighting the need for alternative accommodation solutions and a dedicated child protection system. According to current practice, asylum-seeking children under the age of 12 are not accommodated in the Reception Centre for Asylum Seekers, but instead are placed in foster families. In 2024, children were detained as witnesses in legal proceedings, yet the accommodation capacities foreseen under the Law on Social Protection were not utilised. Instead, the children were accommodated in the Reception Centre for Foreigners.

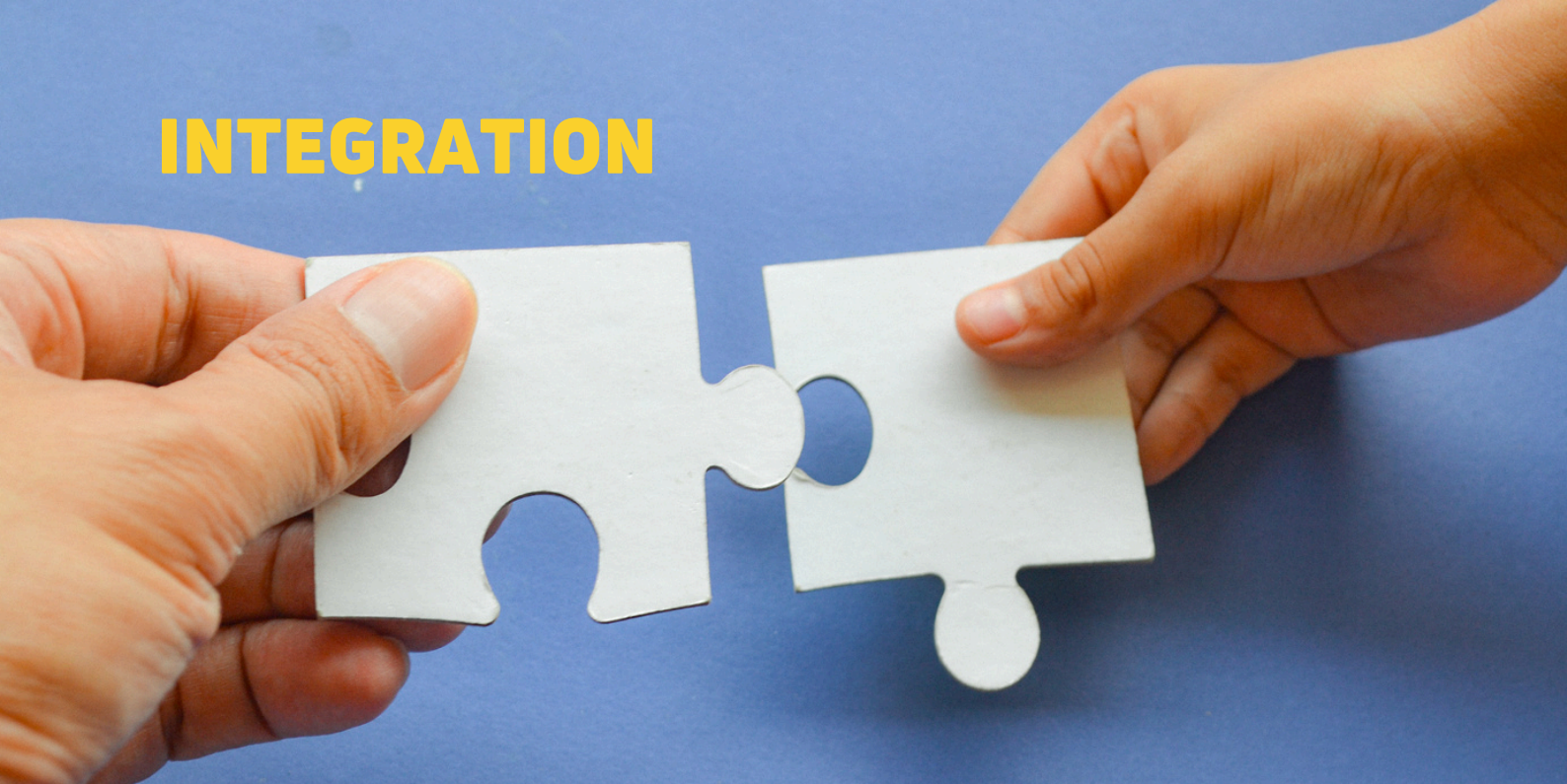
ACCESS TO TERRITORY AND THE PRINCIPLE OF NON-REFOULEMENT

A total of 3,633 persons in 2024 and 3,833 persons in 2025 voluntarily returned to Greece upon their registration at the Vinojug Transit Centre.

THE LACK OF A COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM FOR MONITORING AND PROTECTING THE RIGHTS OF PEOPLE ON THE MOVE, PARTICULARLY AT THE NORTHERN BORDER, REMAINS A CONCERN.

The European Union has recommended systematic registration, protection-sensitive profiling, and improved migration management mechanisms.

INTEGRATION



The integration of refugees, including the early integration of asylum seekers, remained without detailed regulation and without a comprehensive plan, law, or strategy for its implementation. The number of refugees during the past two years was relatively low, and some measures were implemented on an ad hoc basis depending on the needs of individual cases. There is also a lack of long-term official state programmes for teaching the Macedonian language to foreigners and refugees.

Administrative procedures related to housing support through the Centres for Social Work remain slow, while access to housing is further hindered by the requirement for advance payments or rental deposits, which refugees often cannot afford.

In most cases, even after being granted protection, individuals continue to be accommodated in the Reception Centre for Asylum Seekers while waiting for the necessary documents and the completion of several administrative procedures required for the start of their integration process.

- There is a need for a fast and effective procedure for accommodation and social assistance
- Special Care for Children and Vulnerable Categories
- Control and Monitoring of the Development and Needs of Children within the Asylum System



323

Asylum Applications Submitted
A total of 323 persons applied for asylum (267 men and 57 women). Of this number, 27 were unaccompanied children.



5

The Asylum Sector conducted five interviews for the determination of refugee status and issued **decisions discontinuing the procedure for 131 persons.**



5

Higher Administrative Court: 5 appeals submitted.
Average time for a decision: 208 days.



6

Refugee status was granted to six persons who had previously been under subsidiary protection (one person from Afghanistan, two persons from Syria, and three persons from the Democratic Republic of the Congo), while subsidiary protection status was granted to one person from Ukraine.



8

Administrative Court: **8 lawsuits submitted by MYLA.**
Average time for a decision: 129 days.



165

Asylum Applications Submitted: 165 persons (104 men and 61 women). Of this number, 12 were unaccompanied children.

1

Subsidiary protection was granted to one unaccompanied child from Syria.

8

The Asylum Sector conducted eight interviews for the determination of refugee status and **issued decisions discontinuing the procedure for 83 persons.**

2

Administrative Court: 2 lawsuits submitted by MYLA. **Average time for a decision: 128 days.**

1

Higher Administrative Court: 1 appeal submitted. **Average time for a decision: 205 days.**



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS



Amend the Law on International and Temporary Protection and ensure the allocation of personal identification numbers in order to guarantee access to rights, including the right to work, for asylum seekers.

Ensure the effective implementation of the asylum procedure and full respect for the principle of non-refoulement. Make systematic use of country of origin information in asylum procedures and conduct a substantive assessment of asylum seekers' fear of persecution. Ensure the active presence of the Asylum Sector in the Reception Centre for Asylum Seekers.

Establish a state-run system of translators and interpreters for all relevant procedures, following the example of the Asylum Sector, which provides interpreters in refugee status determination procedures.

Improve the system for accommodation and protection of children.

Adopt positive judicial practice and integrate EU standards and case law into domestic asylum procedures and decision-making.

Develop a comprehensive integration plan and adopt a law or strategy on the integration of persons under protection in order to facilitate access to rights and services.