

# Russian Sailors Jailed in Greece for 400 Years for Trafficking Migrants – Reports

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Activists say that Russian sailors take on jobs that they later discover to involve human trafficking out of financial hardship or a need to provide for sick relatives. **Valery Matystin / TASS**

Two Russian sailors have been sentenced to a combined 395 years in prison in Greece for trafficking migrants, the RBC news website [reported](#) Friday.

The sailors claim that they were initially hired to tow yachts and then received threats when they objected to trafficking people, human rights activist Ivan Melnikov told RBC. Interfax [identified](#) them as Alexander Illarionov and Andrei Zhuravlyov.

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A Greek court found the two Russian sailors guilty of organizing illegal migration, said Melnikov, the vice president of the International Human Rights Defense Committee's Russian branch.

The sailors were detained in November 2019 after hitting a storm and making a mayday call. They are among 14 Russian sailors detained in Greece that month, according to Interfax.

Two other Russian sailors have also been jailed for 395 years on trafficking charges in Greece, Interfax reported without specifying their names or when the verdict was handed down. A Nov. 14 report [identified](#) these two other sailors by their last names Malenkov and Belenko.

Melnikov told RBC that Russian sailors take on jobs that they later discover to involve human trafficking out of financial hardship or a need to provide for sick relatives.

Russia's Foreign Ministry [estimated](#) in November that Greece was holding 24 Russian sailors in custody. It added that Italy, another migrant trafficking destination, held 23 Russian sailors.

More than a million migrants and refugees fled conflict and poverty in the Middle East and Africa at the height of what was labeled Europe's refugee crisis in 2015. Their numbers fell significantly after Turkey, the main launching point, reached a deal with the European Union to stem the flow of people.

In August 2019, more than a dozen migrant boats landed in Greece in the first [mass arrival](#) of migrants from Turkey in three years.

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