

The Aegean Tragedy

Key facts and key steps

24 January 2019

Priorities this winter:

- end the humanitarian emergency on the islands
- avoid a new humanitarian emergency on the mainland
- reduce the number of people crossing the Balkan route
- ensure that there are no push backs at any border in South East Europe

For this:

- reduce the number of people crossing to the Aegean islands, and increase the probability of return to Turkey of those who arrive (currently it is below 1 percent),
- move those now on the islands to the mainland,
- create humane reception conditions on the islands.
- A coalition of EU asylum agencies to cooperate with the Greek Asylum Service to ensure that new claims on the islands are dealt with within weeks.
- Once arrivals are reduced again, restart relocation from Greek mainland to other EU member states, also to reduce pressure on the Balkan route.
- EU to reach understanding with Turkey on **Phase II** of the EU-Turkey Statement – guarantee another 6 billion Euros for the growing number of Syrian refugees in Turkey in the coming years. Discuss extending the EU-Turkey agreement to the land border.

To achieve these goals, learn from what has worked and what failed since 2016. This WAS achieved already in spring 2016:

- In the first 3 months of 2016, before the EU-Turkey Statement, ~ 150,000 people arrived on the islands.
- In the 3 months after the statement it was fewer than 7,000.
- In the first 3 months of 2017 it was 4,000. Numbers started to rise again from the middle of 2017.

Sea arrivals in Greece per month 2016/17 (UNHCR)¹

	2016	2017
January	67,415	1,393
February	57,066	1,089
March	26,971	1,526
April	3,650	1,156
May	1,721	2,110
June	1,554	2,012
July	1,920	2,249
August	3,447	3,584
September	3,080	4,886
October	2,970	4,134
November	1,991	3,215
December	1,665	2,364
Total	173,450	29,718

I

It is mere realism to note that the asylum applications of the high number of people now on the islands will not be processed fast. There needs to be a new cut-off date (not announced in advance), a new DAY X, when most/all people now on the islands are moved to the mainland as in March 2016.

New arrivals will be sharply reduced, as in spring 2016, *if* from that moment there is a *high probability of returns to Turkey*. Otherwise it will accelerate arrivals.

What needs to be prepared for this to work:

- Large scale evacuations from the islands to the mainland before DAY X
- Humane accommodation from DAY X for those who arrive
- Preparation of resources to process new arrivals within weeks from DAY X
- Returns of significant numbers not in need of protection to Turkey after DAY X.

II

To be able to return people who arrive after DAY X to Turkey, the following clarity is required:

- Syrians

Turkey offers **all Syrians** who are returned from Greece temporary protection. The EU (under the Facility for Refugees in Turkey, FRIT) offers them humanitarian aid. For Syrians, the Greek Asylum Service does **not** need to establish whether they are refugees (they are) but whether they are protected in Turkey.

Their safety after return to Turkey needs to be verifiable for Greek asylum case workers and the Greek public: this requires a credible mechanism to confirm this.

¹ UNHCR, Operational Portal Refugee Situations, [Greece](#), accessed 23 January 2020.

– Non-Syrians

For all non-Syrians: they CAN be returned to Turkey too – most of the people returned from Greece to Turkey since March 2016 have been non-Syrians – but only after an asylum procedure and if their claims is rejected.

Non-Syrians are not granted temporary protection in Turkey. The possibility for non-Syrians to get protection within the Turkish asylum system remains limited (though the option to apply for protection exists under the 2013 Law on Foreigners and International Protection).

This might change once Turkey processes seriously asylum claims of Afghans, Iraqis and others returned from Greece. But this would need to start happening and be verified. Now it is not the case. However, non-Syrians who are not refugees – who are found not to be in need of protection in an asylum procedure on the Greek islands – can be returned to Turkey.

III

The challenge on the islands is to be able to carry out credible asylum status determination for all non-Syrians *within a few weeks*: the Dutch asylum system, when it is adequately resourced.

At first instance level: how many case workers / interpreters would be required for this? Organise a scenario planning exercise with Greek, German, Dutch and other asylum authorities, with plans for different average daily arrivals: 100 a day, 200 a day, 300 a day.

Scenario based on the experiences of 2019: on average fewer than 200 arrived.

They comprised: 40 percent Afghans
 27 percent Syrians
 33 percent other non-Syrians

Nationalities of sea arrivals in Greece in 2019 (UNHCR)²

Nationality	Arrivals	Share
Afghanistan	23,861	40 %
Syria	16,366	27 %
Other	7,165	12 %
DR Congo	4,027	7 %
Iraq	3,598	6 %
Palestine	3,196	5 %
Iran	1,010	1.7 %
Stateless	203	0.3 %
Pakistan	156	0.3 %
Kuweit	104	0.2 %
Algeria	40	0.1 %
Total	59,726	100 %

² UNHCR, Operational Portal Refugee Situations, [Greece](#), accessed 23 January 2020.

In this scenario: if 90 percent of Syrians (based on admissibility) had been returned to Turkey, and 50 percent of non-Syrians (following a normal asylum procedure), this would have meant the return of more than 36,000 people in 2019. In reality it would have reduced numbers of arrivals well before that.

IV

If the first instance decision can take place within a few weeks (the goal: within 24 days, for everyone who arrives after DAY X) the next challenge is the appeals level.

EU law allows the following: Greece abolishes the appeals panels. Appeals go directly to administrative courts (at first instance) as in Germany. An appeal does not automatically suspend return to Turkey. Appeals against *returns to Turkey* can be decided by ordinary (single) judges in administrative courts. Those rejected at the first instance level and returned to Turkey are waiting for the outcome of their appeal in Turkey, not on the islands.

The verification mechanism the EU needs to set up with Turkey to monitor what happens to Syrians returned there could also verify that *all those returned* are treated in line with the European Convention on Human Rights. *Without a mechanism and credible verifiable guarantees of this, it is certain that any returns will be challenged successfully in European courts.*

V

These additional steps needed from Turkey - allowing a verification mechanism to assess what happens to Syrians and non-Syrians after their return - are discussed and agreed in the context of negotiations over the next 6 billion Euro for the next four years, for refugees now in Turkey.

Note that the number of Syrians who have crossed from Turkey to Greece in 2019 so far remains low (16,366 out of 3.6 million). The money the EU is spending to help integrate Syrians in Turkey has had a huge impact.

In short: What needs to be done now *has already been done once*. It was possible in March 2016 to bring down the number of arrivals very fast.

In the 12 months before 1 April 2016:

1 million	arrived on the Aegean islands
1,152	drowned in the Aegean

In the 12 months after 1 April 2016:

26,000	arrived on the Aegean islands
81	drowned in the Aegean

What never worked well: returning those who arrived on the islands:

143,936	arrived on the islands (18 March 2016 to Dec. 2019)
2,001	returned to Turkey under the Statement until Dec. 2019 (44 per month) (<i>195 returned in 2019 – 16 per month</i>)

VI. Greece cannot cope with asylum applications alone

Since 2017 Greece received more asylum applications per capita than any other EU member state except Cyprus. Left alone, Greece will *not* be able to cope. At the end of 2019:

87,461 asylum applications were pending in Greece

A coalition of EU member states should restart relocation of those in need of protection from the mainland as soon as arrivals numbers have fallen again, as was done successfully in 2016-2017. And member states such as Germany should accelerate family reunification transfers under the Dublin Regulation. This would help refugees and Greece at the same time.

VII. Turkey cannot cope with growing number of Syrian refugees alone

Since 2014 Turkey has been the country in the world hosting most refugees. The number of Syrian refugees in Turkey keeps growing and currently it stands at 3.6 million. Simply through births of Syrian children this number will reach 5.2 million in 2030. It is possible that even more will arrive from Syria (Idlib) this year.

Turkey is not – some speculation to the contrary – “opening the doors” for refugees to head West. In 2019 the vast majority – 99.5 percent – of Syrians in Turkey did *not* go to the EU. This is also due to policies integrating children into local schools and offering access to health care, and a large share of Syrians working unofficially. It is also due to EU-funded social support, benefitting the largest group of refugees – more than 1.7 million - in any country in the world. **This support must continue.** At the same time resettlement of refugees from Turkey, as well as family reunification, should be accelerated.

UNHCR: Registered Syrian Refugees, 2013-2019³

	Worldwide	Turkey
2013	2.3	0.6
2014	3.3	1.6
2015	4.6	2.5
2016	4.8	2.8
2017	5.5	3.4
2018	5.7	3.6
2019	5.7	3.6

What the EU funds: more than 1.7 million refugees in Turkey have an ESSN cash card (Emergency Social Safety Net), which they can use like a normal debit card. Via this card, they receive per month and person 120 Turkish lira (18 Euro). There are quarterly top-ups depending on family size. The ESSN card is the biggest humanitarian project that the EU has ever funded.⁴

Also, 500,000 refugee children receive financial support if they go to school, as well a complementary support to prevent dropouts (Conditional Cash Transfer for Education, CCTE). The amounts depend on grade and gender and range from 35 to 60 Turkish lira per month (5-9 Euro). The EU pays the lion’s share, Norway and the US contribute.⁵

³ UNHCR, “[Syria Regional Refugee Response](#)”, 9 January 2020, accessed 23 January 2020.

⁴ European Commission, “[Questions and answers: Support for refugees in Turkey through the Emergency Social Safety Net](#)”, 31 October 2019.

⁵ European Commission and Turkish Red Crescent, “[Conditional Cash Transfer for Education Programme for Syrian and Other Refugees](#)”, October 2019.

KEY FACTS

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Arrivals in Greece

Sea arrivals Greece (UNHCR)⁶

	Arrivals	Daily
2014	41,038	112
2015	856,723	2,347
2016 before EU-TR statement	151,452	1,683
2016 after EU-TR statement	21,998	80
2017	29,718	81
2018	32,494	89
2019	59,726	164
Since EU-TR statement	143,936	104

September 2019 saw the highest number of people arrive on Greek islands in one month since the EU-Turkey statement: 10,551.

However, compared to the period before the Statement the numbers of arrivals remain low. In February 2016, 57,066 arrived.

⁶ UNHCR, Operational Portal Refugee Situations, [Greece](#), accessed 23 January 2020.

Sea arrivals in Greece per month (UNHCR)⁷

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
January	955	1,694	67,415	1,393	1,633	1,851
February	1,001	2,873	57,066	1,089	1,256	1,486
March	1,501	7,874	26,971	1,526	2,441	1,904
April	1,257	13,556	3,650	1,156	3,032	1,856
May	1,703	17,889	1,721	2,110	2,916	2,651
June	3,198	31,318	1,554	2,012	2,439	3,122
July	3,927	54,899	1,920	2,249	2,545	5,008
August	6,742	107,843	3,447	3,584	3,197	7,712
September	7,454	147,123	3,080	4,886	3,960	10,551
October	7,432	211,663	2,970	4,134	4,073	8,996
November	3,812	151,249	1,991	3,215	2,075	8,426
December	2,056	108,742	1,665	2,364	2,927	6,163
Total	41,038	856,723	173,450	29,718	32,494	59,726

The number of arrivals across the Turkish-Greek land border has also risen. This flow is not covered by the EU-Turkey Statement at present:

Land arrivals in Greece (UNHCR)⁸

Arrivals	
2014	2,280
2015	4,907
2016	3,784
2017	6,592
2018	18,014
2019	14,887

Land arrivals Greece per month (UNHCR)⁹

	2018	2019
January	531	801
February	544	830
March	1,503	1,255
April	3,822	1,164
May	1,818	547
June	1,226	937
July	1,599	834
August	1,123	1,622
September	1,702	1,979
October	1,975	1,987
November	1,128	1,539
December	1,043	1,392
Total	18,014	14,887

⁷ UNHCR, Operational Portal Refugee Situations, [Greece](#), accessed 23 January 2020.

⁸ UNHCR, Operational Portal Refugee Situations, [Greece](#), accessed 23 January 2020.

⁹ UNHCR, Operational Portal Refugee Situations, [Greece](#), accessed 23 January 2020.

In negotiations with Turkey about the next 6 billion support to refugees, it could be proposed to extend the EU-Turkey Statement to the land border (it would only apply to non-Turks).

One-third of those illegally crossing the land border in 2018, and 37 percent of those in 2019, were Turkish citizens.¹⁰ For these, Germany and other EU countries should offer to relocate those in need of protection.

Sea and land arrivals in Greece (UNHCR)¹¹

	Sea	Land	Total
2014	41,038	2,280	43,318
2015	856,723	4,907	861,630
2016	173,450	3,784	177,234
2017	29,718	6,592	36,310
2018	32,494	18,014	50,508
2019	59,726	14,887	74,613

Sea arrivals Eastern Mediterranean route until Nov. 2019 (Frontex)¹²

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Afghanistan	11,582	212,286	41,775	3,713	9,597	24,439
Syria	27,025	489,011	81,570	13,957	8,173	15,268
Iraq	382	90,130	26,573	6,417	6,029	3,506
Palestine	495	6,331	1,972	823	1,571	2,954
D.R. Congo	153	756	358	71	1,677	2,842
Somalia	1,621	4,470	449	243	737	2,404
Iran	96	22,995	5,353	793	613	1,667
Cameroon	294	872	316	549	1,201	878
Congo	73	774	492	1,009	212	872
Turkey	27	93	122	299	450	537
Pakistan	85	23,884	8,682	1,699	591	418
Egypt	312	552	475	222	301	407
Ghana	41	284	75	79	214	367
Yemen	25	345	56	207	323	320
Unknown	1	75	1	409	96	268
Gambia	17	193	44	19	54	212

Note: Frontex' Eastern Mediterranean data includes Cyprus, numbers are therefore somewhat higher than UNHCR's for Greece only.

¹⁰ Frontex, [Detections of illegal border-crossings statistics download \(updated monthly\)](#), accessed 23 January 2020.

¹¹ UNHCR, Operational Portal Refugee Situations, [Greece](#), accessed 23 January 2020.

¹² Frontex, [Detections of illegal border-crossings statistics download \(updated monthly\)](#), accessed 23 January 2020.

(Less) Deadly Aegean*Deaths in the Eastern Mediterranean (IOM)¹³*

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
January	12	0	275	1	0	2
February	0	9	46	1	1	1
March	9	8	45	11	19	11
April	0	14	10	24	0	5
May	0	0	0	0	16	18
June	0	6	0	0	10	19
July	25	24	7	8	50	1
August	0	29	3	0	10	0
September	0	190	27	1	12	9
October	0	220	2	0	38	5
November	4	98	14	15	11	0
December	9	205	5	1	7	0
Total	59	803	434	62	174	71

Deaths in the whole Mediterranean (IOM)¹⁴

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Eastern Mediterranean route	59	803	434	62	174	71
Central Mediterranean route	3,165	3,149	4,581	2,853	1,314	770
Western Mediterranean route	59	102	128	224	811	477
Total	3,283	4,054	5,143	3,139	2,299	1,318

¹³ IOM/Missing Migrants Project, Region: [Mediterranean](#), accessed 23 January 2020.

¹⁴ IOM/Missing Migrants Project, Region: [Mediterranean](#), accessed 23 January 2020.

Ever fewer returns to Turkey

Until the end of 2019, 2,001 people were returned to Turkey under the Statement. The largest number was returned in the first month after the Statement, in April 2016: 386 people. Since then there has been a steady decrease in returns.

Returns from Greece to Turkey (UNHCR)¹⁵

	2016	2017	2018	2019	Total
January	-	64	47	19	
February	-	34	23	13	
March	-	45	29	5	
April	386	150	18	10	
May	55	87	29	14	
June	27	48	20	18	
July	0	60	23	7	
August	16	18	17	15	
September	94	29	48	7	
October	139	57	17	36	
November	31	75	40	25	
December	53	16	11	26	
Total	801	683	322	195	2,001

The likelihood of being sent back to Turkey has been a mere 1.4 percent. For the three largest groups arriving – Syrians, Afghans and Iraqis – it has been even smaller.

Likelihood of return to Turkey (until 31 Aug. 2019; UNHCR)¹⁶

Nationality	Arrivals	Returned	Likelihood
Syria	32,100	351	1.1 %
Afghanistan	25,200	111	0.4 %
Iraq	16,000	96	0.6 %
Pakistan	3,900	716	18.4 %
Algeria	2,800	201	7.2 %
Iran	2,600	53	2.0 %

880 of the 2,001 people returned until end-2019 had undergone an asylum procedure in Greece and received a negative decision at the first instance (40 people) or the second instance (840 people). The latter number included 43 people, all Syrians, who had received a second-instance decision *in an admissibility procedure* declaring that Turkey is safe for them. The remaining returnees with second-instance decisions were rejected in a regular asylum procedure.

¹⁵ UNHCR, “[Returns from Greece to Turkey as of 31 December 2019](#)” and “[Returns from Greece to Turkey \(under EU-Turkey statement\) as of 21 June 2017](#)”.

¹⁶ Calculations based on UNHCR, Operational Portal Refugee Situations, [Greece](#), accessed 23 Jan. 2020; UNHCR, “[Greece Sea Arrivals Dashboard January 2019](#)”; UNHCR, “[Greece Sea Arrivals Dashboard for 2017](#)”; UNHCR, “[Refugees and Migrants Arrivals to Europe in 2017](#)”; and UNHCR, “[Europe -Refugee and Migrant arrivals data as of 22 Nov 2017 \(raw data\)](#).”

Another 880 of the 2,001 returned had never asked for asylum or withdrawn their application. (In the remaining 240 instances the cases were closed for other reasons or no information was available.)¹⁷

The annual number of cases where the Greek Asylum Service (GAS) declared Turkey a safe country at the first instance has dropped year by year since 2016.

First-instance decisions declaring Turkey a safe country for Syrians (GAS)¹⁸

Year	Decisions
2016	1,305
2017	912
2018	399
2019	241
Total	2,857

Among those returned to Turkey the largest group has been Pakistanis:

Nationalities of those returned to Turkey (UNHCR)¹⁹

Nationality	Returned
Pakistan	732
Syria	367
Algeria	201
Afghanistan	126
Iraq	112
Bangladesh	103
Iran	54
Morocco	53
Egypt	31
Nigeria	24
Other	198
Total	2,001

¹⁷ UNHCR, "[Returns from Greece to Turkey \(under EU-Turkey statement\) as of 31 December 2019](#)".

¹⁸ Greek Asylum Service, "[Statistical Data of the Greek Asylum Service \(from 07.06.2013 to 31.10.2019\)](#)".

¹⁹ UNHCR, "[Returns from Greece to Turkey \(under EU-Turkey statement\) as of 30 November 2019](#)".

The Greek asylum system

In 2018 and 2017, Greece received more asylum applications per capita than any other EU member state except Cyprus in 2018. 2019 will be similar.

Asylum requests EU member states per 100,000 inhabitants²⁰

Country	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Cyprus	203	267	347	538	898
Greece	86	122	474	545	624
Malta	314	420	428	400	448
Luxembourg	209	445	375	412	388
Germany	251	587	907	270	223
Sweden	843	1,668	293	264	213
Belgium	204	398	162	162	198
France	97	115	126	149	180
Austria	330	1,027	486	282	156
Netherlands	146	266	123	107	140
Slovenia	19	13	63	71	139
EU28 average	124	260	247	139	126
Spain	12	32	34	79	116
Italy	106	137	203	213	99
Finland	66	591	103	91	82
Ireland	31	70	48	61	76
Denmark	261	371	109	56	62
United Kingdom	51	62	61	53	57
Bulgaria	153	283	271	52	36
Croatia	11	5	53	23	19
Czech Republic	11	14	14	14	16
Lithuania	15	11	15	19	14
Portugal	4	9	14	17	12
Romania	8	6	10	25	11
Poland	21	32	32	13	11
Latvia	19	17	18	18	10
Estonia	12	17	13	14	7
Hungary	433	1,797*	299	35	7
Slovakia	6	6	3	3	3

* *Almost all of the claims in Hungary were submitted in transit, so Hungary is disregarded.*

If France with its 67 million inhabitants had 624 asylum claims per 100,000 inhabitants like Greece, it would receive 417,300 claims. In fact, France received 120,425 claims in 2018, which was already a French record (and which might be slightly surpassed in 2019).

²⁰ Eurostat, [Asylum and first time asylum applicants by citizenship, age and sex Annual aggregated data \(rounded\)](#) and [Population on 1 January](#), accessed on 9 September 2019.

At the end of December 2019 there were 87,461 pending asylum applications in the whole of Greece, including claims from 27,608 Afghans and 16,165 Syrians.²¹

Since the Greek Asylum Service became operational in 2013, it never managed to keep up with submitted claims.

First-instance decisions in Greece (GAS)²²

	Claims	All decisions	On merit	Inadmissibility/ Relocation
2013	4,814	2,338	2,077	261
2014	9,431	7,417	5,964	1,453
2015	13,187	10,446	8,428	2,018
2016	51,053	24,516	9,285	15,231
2017	58,637	44,929	22,480	22,449
2018	66,963	35,577	30,752	4,825
2019	77,287	35,464	31,044	4,420
Total	281,372	160,687	110,030	50,657

In recent years, the recognition rate in Greece has been higher than the EU average.

*Recognition rates first-instance decisions on merit (GAS and Eurostat)²³
(Refugee status and subsidiary protection)*

	Decisions	Positive	GR rate	EU rate
2013	2,076	322	16 %	30 %
2014	5,964	1,710	29 %	41 %
2015	8,428	3,994	47 %	48 %
2016	9,285	2,700	29 %	53 %
2017	22,480	10,347	46 %	39 %
2018	30,747	15,188	49 %	32 %
2019 (-July)	17,705	9,731	55 %	32 %

The recognition rate in 2016 was low because asylum seekers with a high recognition rate (75 percent or higher) were relocated to other EU member states.

²¹ Greek Asylum Service, "[Statistical Data of the Greek Asylum Service \(from 07.06.2013 to 31.12.2019\)](#)".

²² Greek Asylum Service, "[Statistical Data of the Greek Asylum Service \(from 07.06.2013 to 31.12.2019\)](#)".

²³ Greek Asylum Service, "[Statistical Data of the Greek Asylum Service \(from 07.06.2013 to 31.07.2019\)](#)" and Eurostat, "[First instance decisions on applications by citizenship, age and sex, Annual aggregated data \(rounded\)](#)", as of 11 July 2019, accessed 10 Sept. 2019; and Eurostat, "[First instance decisions on applications by citizenship, age and sex, Quarterly data \(rounded\)](#)", as of 19 Sept. 2019, accessed 23 Sept. 2019.

Refugee status and subsidiary protection in 2018 (Eurostat)²⁴

	Greece	EU28	Germany	France
Palestine	98 %	71 %	No decisions	70 %
Eritrea	94 %	81 %	83 %	82 %
Syria	93 %	87 %	85 %	85 %
Somalia	92 %	48 %	40 %	38 %
Turkey	84 %	45 %	45 %	29 %
Afghanistan	75 %	38 %	19 %	67 %
Sudan	69 %	54 %	38 %	62 %
Iraq	67 %	37 %	31 %	73 %
Iran	66 %	38 %	30 %	33 %
Nigeria	7.7 %	8.3 %	11 %	7.7 %
Bangladesh	2.8 %	4.6 %	7.4 %	10 %
Pakistan	2.5 %	8.3 %	3.6 %	5.6 %
Albania	0.2 %	6.4 %	0.5 %	11 %
Georgia	0 %	2.9 %	0.4 %	5.5 %

Asylum procedures on the islands

38,358 Syrians arrived on the islands until 7 May 2018. Of these 26,150 (68 percent) were declared vulnerable. They could leave the islands on this basis.

Another 5,378 Syrians were found to have a right, under the Dublin Regulation, to be transferred to other EU member states (usually for family reunification). Only 2,478 (6 percent) were deemed fit to return to Turkey.

Syrians on the Greek islands 21 March 2016 – 7 May 2018 (European Commission)²⁵

No return to Turkey due to vulnerability	26,150	68%
No return to Turkey because of Dublin	5,378	14%
No return to Turkey for other reasons	4,352	11%
Possible return to Turkey	2,478	6%
Total	38,358	

The claims of *non-Syrian* asylum seekers are examined on merit (unless they were Dublin cases). If, after a negative decision, claimants do not appeal or their appeal is not successful, they can also be returned to Turkey.

In half of 10,620 on-merit decisions until 7 May 2018, the first-instance decisions were negative:

²⁴ Eurostat, [“First instance decisions on asylum applications by type of decision - annual aggregated data”](#), accessed on 24 September 2019.

²⁵ European Commission, Migration Crisis Information Sheet, 8 May 2018.

Island asylum procedures on merit until 7 May 2018²⁶

Positive decisions	5,414
Negative decisions	5,206
Total decisions	10,620

Until 7 May 2018, 6,136 appeals were filed by those who had received negative decisions on merit (5,206) on the islands or who had been told to go back under the protection scheme for Syrians in Turkey in an admissibility procedure (2,478). This means 80 percent had appealed.

The appeals committees decided 3,098 of those 6,136 appeals.²⁷ On average they received 245 appeals and issued 124 decisions each month.

They confirmed 95 percent of the first-instance negative decisions on merit (2,119 of 2,242).

Concerning decisions on inadmissibility the appeals committees initially overturned all first-instance decisions. This changed after Greece's highest administrative court, the Council of State, upheld a return decision concerning two Syrians on 22 September 2017.²⁸

By 7 May 2018, the committees had upheld 435 of 856 inadmissibility decisions to send Syrian asylum seekers back to Turkey. They overturned 421.

Appeals panels' decisions on islands, 20 March 2016 to 7 May 2018²⁹

Appeals	6,136
– Decided	3,098
Appeals decisions on return to Turkey as a safe third country	856
– Appellant must return to Turkey	435
– Appellant is granted protection or case is sent back to first instance	421
Appeals decisions on merit	2,242
– Appellant has no right to protection	2,119
– Appellant is granted protection	123

Although the appeals committees confirmed Turkey's safety for return for 435 people by 7 May 2018, only 23 of those returned to Turkey.³⁰ The remaining 412 cases are likely to have absconded, irregularly reaching Greek mainland and from there possibly other EU countries.

After a failed appeal, applicants can turn to the Greek Administrative Court of Appeals. This is costly, legal aid is hard to obtain at present and it does not prevent removal.³¹

²⁶ European Commission, Migration Crisis Information Sheet, 8 May 2018.

²⁷ European Commission, Migration Crisis Information Sheet, 8 May 2018.

²⁸ Asylum Information Database (AIDA), "[Country report Greece](#)", March 2018, p. 101-103. From September 2017 until 7 May 2018, all decisions by the appeals committees upheld the first-instance inadmissibility decision since the number of decisions *annulling* the first-instance decision was 421 both at the end of August 2017 and in May 2018. See European Commission, [Seventh report on the progress made in the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement](#), 6 September 2017, p. 6.

²⁹ European Commission, Migration Crisis Information Sheet, 8 May 2018.

³⁰ European Commission, Migration Crisis Information Sheet, 8 May 2018.

³¹ Asylum Information Database (AIDA), "[Country report Greece](#)", March 2019, p. 56-58.

Reception crisis on the islands

The reception centres on the Greek islands overcrowded shortly after implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement began. There has never been enough staff - doctors, nurses, psychologists, interpreters, guards – to respond to the needs to the refugees and migrants. Many have had to sleep in tents and make-shifts camps, and the sanitary conditions have been dismal.

*Migrant population and available accommodation on the islands on 31 Dec. 2019
(Greek government)³²*

Island	Population	Capacity	Demand met
Lesvos	20,785	4,061	20%
Samos	8,064	948	12%
Chios	6,078	1,320	22%
Kos	4,119	1,503	36%
Leros	2,757	1,116	40%
Other islands	96	81	84%
Total	41,899	9,029	22%

Of the 9,029 available places, 6,178 are in the Registration and Identification Centres (RICs) on the islands, and the remaining are offered by UNHCR, the Greek National Centre for Social Security and NGOs.³³

*Migrant population and available accommodation on the islands on 22 Jan. 2020
(Greek government)³⁴*

Island	Population	Capacity	Demand met
Lesvos	21,315	4,070	19%
Samos	7,501	948	13%
Chios	5,918	1,318	22%
Kos	4,239	1,503	35%
Leros	2,652	1,116	42%
Other islands	111	81	73%
Total	41,736	9,036	22%

Of the 9,036 available places, 6,178 are in the Registration and Identification Centres (RICs) on the islands, and the remaining are offered by UNHCR, the Greek National Centre for Social Security and NGOs.³⁵

³² Hellenic Republic, Ministry of Citizen Protection, „[National Situational Picture Regarding the Islands at Eastern Aegean Sea \(1/1/2020\)](#)”.

³³ Hellenic Republic, Ministry of Citizen Protection, „[National Situational Picture Regarding the Islands at Eastern Aegean Sea \(1/1/2020\)](#)”.

³⁴ Hellenic Republic, Ministry of Citizen Protection, „[National Situational Picture Regarding the Islands at Eastern Aegean Sea \(23/1/2020\)](#)”.

³⁵ Hellenic Republic, Ministry of Citizen Protection, „[National Situational Picture Regarding the Islands at Eastern Aegean Sea \(23/1/2020\)](#)”.

Transfers to the mainland

UNHCR has, since June 2016, assisted Greek authorities in transferring vulnerable asylum seekers and recognised refugees to the mainland.

*UNHCR-assisted transfers from Greek islands to the mainland*³⁶

	2016	2017	2018	2019	Total 2016-19
January		1,168	2,337	1,633	
February		1,581	1,090	831	
March		512	680	2,074	
April		530	1,625	336	
May		775	1,087	317	
June		907	994	297	
July		1,038	1,039	359	
August		1,945	1,547	852	
September		1,323	2,600	2,230	
October		2,067	2,255	1,700	
November		2,128	3,060	2,700	
December		3,195	3,600		
Total	3,790	17,169	21,914	13,329	56,202

Greek authorities also transfer people on their own, without any UNHCR assistance, and some manage to leave on their own. In total, more than 100,000 people must have left the islands one way or another. (Of the 144,000 that arrived on the islands since March 2016, 40,000 are currently there; 2,001 were returned to Turkey; and up to 5,000 went back voluntarily to their home countries (assisted voluntary return³⁷).

Relocation from Greece

Between the end of 2015 and early 2018, 22,000 asylum seekers “in clear need of international protection” (EU recognition rate of at least 75 percent) were relocated from Greece to other EU and Schengen countries. The relocation programme³⁸ ended in September 2017, after that only pending cases were relocated.

From Italy, 12,700 asylum seekers were relocated under the same programme.

³⁶ Data for 2016: UNHCR’s “Fact Sheet Greece” for [December 2017](#) mentions 20,959 transfers since June 2016. Minus the 17,169 transfers in 2017, this makes 3,790 in 2016. Data for 2017: “UNHCR Fact Sheet Greece”(or “Fact Sheet Aegean Islands”) for [January](#), [February](#), [March](#), [April](#), [May](#), [June](#), [July](#), [August](#), [September](#), [October](#), [November](#), and [December](#); data for 2018: UNHCR “Fact Sheet Greece”(or “Fact Sheet Aegean Islands”) for: [January](#), [February](#), [March](#), [April](#), [May](#), [June](#), [July](#), [August](#), [September](#), [October](#), [November](#) and [December](#); data for 2019: UNHCR “Fact Sheet Greece” for [January](#), [February](#), [March](#), [April](#), [May](#), [June](#), [July](#), [August](#), [September](#), [October](#) and [November](#).

³⁷ During the first three years of the EU-Turkey Statement, that is until March 2019, 3,421 returned voluntarily from the Greek islands through the Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Programme. European Commission, “[EU-Turkey Statement: Three years on](#)”, March 2019.

³⁸ [Council Decision \(EU\) 2015/1523 of 14 September 2015](#) and [Council Decision \(EU\) 2015/1601 of 22 September 2015 establishing provisional measures in the area of international protection for the benefit of Italy and Greece](#).

*Asylum seekers relocated from Greece (European Commission)*³⁹

Receiving state	Relocated
Germany	5,391
France	4,394
Netherlands	1,755
Sweden	1,656
Finland	1,202
Portugal	1,192
Spain	1,124
Ireland	1,022
Belgium	700
Norway	693
Romania	683
Switzerland	580
Lithuania	355
Luxembourg	300
Latvia	294
Slovenia	172
Estionia	141
Malta	101
Cyprus	96
Croatia	60
Bulgaria	50
Slovakia	16
Czech Republic	12
Liechtenstein	10
Total	21,999

Four member states refused to participate in relocation (Austria, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia). Denmark and the UK could – and both did – opt out. Ireland decided to participate on a voluntary basis. Greece and Italy did not have to accept refugees.

Relocations from Greece started on 4 November 2015 with 30 asylum seekers from Syria and Iraq travelling to Luxembourg.⁴⁰ Until March 2016, when the EU-Turkey Statement was concluded, the figure of relocated asylum seekers reached 600. During the first year of the EU-Turkey Statement, close to 10,000 people were relocated, and in 2017 it was 11,700.

³⁹ European Commission, "[Member states' support to Emergency Relocation Mechanism](#)", as of 30 October 2018, accessed 2 October 2019.

⁴⁰ UNHCR, "[First asylum-seekers relocate from Greece to Luxembourg](#)", 4 November 2015.

Relocation from Greece to other EUMS⁴¹

	Cumulative number
4 Nov. 2015	30
15 Dec. 2015	64
12 Jan. 2016	82
15 March 2016	569
6 Dec. 2016	6,212
6 Jan. 2017	7,280
22 March 2017	10,324
22 Dec. 2017	21,711
7 March 2018	21,847
End-March 2018	21,999

How Dublin helps Greece

Since 2013, only 76 people have been transferred to Greece from other EU member states under the Dublin Regulation. 15,046 have been transferred from Greece to other EU member states.

Dublin requests and transfers to Greece (GAS)⁴²

Year	Requests	Accepted	Transfers
2013	13	4	0
2014	49	19	2
2015	135	61	16
2016	5,797	2,236	6
2017	2,134	66	1
2018	9,219	229	18
2019	12,718	710	33
Total	30,065	3,325	76

Of the 30,065 requests to Greece by other member states, 15,175 (50 percent) concerned an asylum request submitted in Greece and another 11,832 (39 percent) concerned Greece as the first country of irregular arrival.⁴³

⁴¹ The data is taken from various European Commission documents. Where links are available, the dates are hyperlinked. The remaining figures are taken from the document [“Member states’ support to Emergency Relocation Mechanism”](#), which was frequently updated and accessed by ESI at different times.

⁴² Greek Asylum Service, [“Asylum Service Statistical data – Dublin Regulation III Procedures \(as of 31.12.2019\)”](#).

⁴³ Greek Asylum Service, [“Asylum Service Statistical data – Dublin Regulation III Procedures \(as of 31.12.2019\)”](#).

Dublin requests and transfers from Greece (GAS)⁴⁴

Year	Requests	Accepted	Transfers
2013	404	246	45
2014	1,113	837	506
2015	1,092	802	747
2016	4,878	3,214	936
2017	9,536	7,819	4,722
2018	5,101	2,681	5,548
2019	5,459	2,523	2,542
Total	27,583	18,122	15,046

Of the 27,583 Dublin requests submitted by the Greek authorities, 20,494 (74 percent) concerned family reunification.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Greek Asylum Service, [“Asylum Service Statistical data – Dublin Regulation III Procedures \(as of 31.12.2019\)”](#).

⁴⁵ Greek Asylum Service, [“Asylum Service Statistical data – Dublin Regulation III Procedures \(as of 31.12.2019\)”](#).

Resettlement of Syrians from Turkey to EU

Another provision of the EU-Turkey Statement is the resettlement of Syrian refugees from Turkey to EU member states. Since the agreement, EU member states have taken in more than 25,000. There are 3.6 million registered Syrian refugees in Turkey.⁴⁶

*Resettlement of Syrian refugees from Turkey to EU member states as of 16 Sept. 2019
(European Commission)⁴⁷*

Member State	Syrians resettled
Germany	8,596
France	4,455
Netherlands	4,139
Sweden	1,910
Finland	1,823
Belgium	1,374
Spain	692
Italy	377
Portugal	218
Austria	210
Luxembourg	206
Croatia	200
Lithuania	102
Estonia	66
Latvia	46
Slovenia	34
Bulgaria	27
Malta	17
Total	24,492

Ten EU member states have not resettled Syrian refugees for various reasons: Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and the UK.

⁴⁶ UNHCR, Syria Regional Refugee Response, [Turkey](#), accessed 23 January 2020.

⁴⁷ European Commission, [“Operational implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement”](#), as of 16 September 2019, accessed 2 October 2019.