

The EU-Turkey Statement three years on

15 April 2019

The EU and Turkey issued their statement on 18 March 2016

Before 18 March 2016

1 Million	arrived on the Aegean islands in the 12 months before
1,152	drowned in the Aegean in the 12 months before (April 2015-March 2016)

After 18 March 2016

26,000	arrived on the Aegean islands in the 12 months after
81	drowned in the Aegean in the 12 months after

84,210	arrived on the Greek islands in the 33 months after March 2016
1,806	<i>of these</i> were returned to Turkey under the Statement (2 percent)
322	<i>of these</i> were returned in 2018

61,750	asylum applications were pending in Greece in December 2018
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In 2017 and 2018 Greece had the highest number of asylum requests per capita in the EU



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Arrivals from Turkey across the sea

The EU-Turkey Statement entered into force on 20 March 2016. It led to a dramatic and immediate fall in the number of refugees and migrants arriving from Turkey by sea on Greek islands. While 151,000 people arrived during the first three months of 2016, the number was just 22,000 between April and December.

Table: Sea arrivals in Greece per year 2014-2018 (UNHCR)¹

	Arrivals	Average per day
2014	41,038	112
2015	856,723	2,347
2016 before agreement	151,452	1,683
2016 after agreement	21,998	80
2017	29,718	81
2018	32,494	89
Since agreement	84,210	84

Look at arrivals across the sea in the last five years. Twelve months stand out: April 2015 to March 2016:

Table: Sea arrivals in Greece per month 2014-2018 (UNHCR)²

	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	
May	1,703	17,889	1,721	2,110	2,916	
June	3,198	31,318	1,554	2,012	2,439	
July	3,927	54,899	1,920	2,249	2,545	
August	6,742	107,843	3,447	3,584	3,197	
September	7,454	147,123	3,080	4,886	3,960	
October	7,432	211,663	2,970	4,134	4,073	
November	3,812	151,249	1,991	3,215	2,075	
December	2,056	108,742	1,665	2,364	2,927	
Total	41,038	856,723	173,450	29,718	32,494	5,241

There was a modest increase in arrivals from 29,718 in 2017 to 32,494 in 2018.

¹ UNHCR, Operational Portal Refugee Situations, [Greece](#), accessed 15 March 2019.

² UNHCR, Operational Portal Refugee Situations, [Greece](#), accessed 15 April 2019.

The largest group of people arriving by sea last year were Afghans, followed by Syrians and Iraqis.

Table: Sea arrivals in Greece, 1 January 2018–31 January 2019 (UNHCR)³

Nationality	Individuals
Afghanistan	9,788
Syria	8,090
Iraq	6,018
D.R. Congo	2,013
Palestine	1,896
Iran	587
Algeria	390
Stateless	300
Pakistan	282
Kuwait	73
Others	4,908

Whereas the situation at the sea border remained stable in 2018, the number of arrivals across the Turkish-Greek land border rose from 6,600 in 2017 to 18,000 in 2018. This irregular migration flow across the land border is not covered by the EU-Turkey Statement.

Table: Sea and land arrivals in Greece per year 2014-31 March 2019 (UNHCR)⁴

	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 (- March)	5,241	2,886	8,127

The largest group – around one-third – of the people illegally crossing the land border are Turkish citizens, followed by Syrians and Iraqis.⁵

³ UNHCR, Operational Portal Refugee Situations, [Greece](#), accessed 15 February 2018.

⁴ UNHCR, Operational Portal Refugee Situations, [Greece](#), accessed 15 March 2019.

⁵ Frontex, “[Risk Analysis for 2019](#)”, 20 February 2019, p. 43.

The deadly Aegean

In 2015 an estimated 803 people drowned in the Aegean. In the first three months of 2016, before the EU Turkey statement, 366 people lost their lives here.

In 2018 the number of people who lost their lives crossing the Aegean Sea was 167. There were three large accidents with 19, 44, and 34 deaths (in March, July and October 2018) and 16 smaller accidents.⁶

Table: Deaths in the Eastern Mediterranean per month 2016 – 2018 (IOM)⁷

	2014	2015	2016 before agreement	2016 after agreement	2017	2018
January	12	0	275	-	1	0
February	0	9	46	-	1	1
March	9	8	45	-	11	19
April	0	14	-	10	24	0
May	0	0	-	0	0	16
June	0	6	-	0	0	10
July	25	24	-	7	8	50
August	0	29	-	3	0	10
September	0	190	-	27	1	12
October	0	220	-	2	0	38
November	0	98	-	14	15	11
December	0	205	-	5	1	0
Total	46	803	366	68	62	167

⁶ IOM Missing Migrants Project, Downloads, [Dataset 2018](#), accessed 11 March 2018.

⁷ IOM Missing Migrants Project, Region: [Mediterranean](#), accessed on 5 March 2019.

Ever fewer returns to Turkey

In the first two weeks of March 2016, when there was no agreement, the number of people readmitted to Turkey was 386.

From April 2016 until December 2018, 1,806 people were returned to Turkey under the EU-Turkey Statement.⁸ This is 2 percent of the 84,210 refugees and migrants who arrived on the Greek islands in this period. The largest number (386) were returned in the first month in April 2016. In all of 2018 the number was lower than that, with 322 people in total, less than 1 percent of those who arrived in that year.

Table: Monthly returns from Greece to Turkey 2016-2019 (UNHCR)⁹

	2016	2017	2018	2019
January	-	64	47	15
February	-	34	23	13
March	-	45	29	
April	386	150	18	
May	55	87	29	
June	27	48	20	
July	0	60	23	
August	16	18	17	
September	94	29	48	
October	139	57	17	
November	31	75	40	
December	53	16	11	
Total	801	683	322	28
Overall total until end 2018:			1,806	

⁸ UNHCR, „[Returns from Greece to Turkey \(under EU-Turkey Statement\) as of 31 December 2018](#)”.

⁹ UNHCR, „Returns from Greece to Turkey (under EU-Turkey Statement)” - [as of 31 December 2018](#), [as of 28 February 2019](#) and [as of 31 January 2019](#).

The majority of those returned to Turkey are Pakistanis (39 percent), followed by Syrians (19 percent) and Algerians (11 percent). Ninety-one percent are men.¹⁰ Fifty-eight percent of the 1,806 returnees had *not* applied for asylum or had withdrawn their applications.¹¹

Table: Returns from Greece to Turkey (April 2016 to December 2018) (UNHCR)¹²

Nationality	Returned
Pakistan	703
Syria	337
Algeria	198
Afghanistan	102
Bangladesh	99
Iraq	77
Morocco	51
Iran	48
Egypt	20
Nigeria	18
Other	153
TOTAL	1,806

The probability to be sent back to Turkey has been around 1 percent for the three top nationalities of arrival (Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq).

Table: Sea arrivals in Greece and returns to Turkey April 2016 to December 2018 (UNHCR)¹³

Nationality	Arrivals	Returned	Probability
Syria	26,803	337	1.3 %
Afghanistan	15,226	102	0.7 %
Iraq	13,973	77	0.6 %
Pakistan	3,805	703	18.0 %
Algeria	2,752	198	7.2 %
Iran	2,121	48	2.3 %

Of the 337 Syrians returned, only 36 were returned on the basis that their asylum claim was found inadmissible at second instance, i.e. that Turkey was found to be a safe country for them.¹⁴

Turkey currently hosts an estimated 3.6 million Syrian refugees under its Temporary Protection Scheme for Syrians.

¹⁰ UNHCR, „Returns from Greece to Turkey (under EU-Turkey Statement) as of 31 December 2018”.

¹¹ UNHCR, „Returns from Greece to Turkey (under EU-Turkey Statement) as of 31 December 2018”.

¹² UNHCR, „Returns from Greece to Turkey (under EU-Turkey Statement) as of 31 December 2018”.

¹³ Calculations based on UNHCR, Operational Portal Refugee Situations, [Greece](#), accessed 5 March 2018; 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)”.

¹⁴ UNHCR, „Returns from Greece to Turkey (under EU-Turkey Statement) as of 31 December 2018”.

Asylum procedures in Greece

The Greek Asylum Service (GAS) was created in 2011 by law and became operational in 2013. Since then, the numbers of applications and decisions have grown rapidly. However, the GAS has not been able to keep up with the number of claims submitted, so asylum seekers wait a long time for a first-instance decision: 6 months plus another 3 months between submission of the claim and registration¹⁵. On the islands it is 3 months from registration.¹⁶

Currently there are 61,570 pending applications, according to the GAS.¹⁷

Table: Asylum applications and first-instance decisions in Greece 2013-2018 (GAS)¹⁸

Year	Claims	Decisions
2013	4,814	2,337
2014	9,431	7,417
2015	13,187	10,447
2016	51,053	24,516
2017	58,642	44,931
2018	66,969	35,582
Total	204,096	125,230

In 2015 and 2016, many of the decisions taken by the GAS were not on the merits of the application (does the applicant need international protection), but on admissibility (whether Greece is responsible for examining a claim or whether somebody is to be sent elsewhere for the regular asylum procedure).

In these two years, the GAS used admissibility procedures to relocate more than 23,300 asylum seekers to other EU member states. It also transferred another 10,400 claimants to other member states under the Dublin Regulation. Here the GAS did not examine whether the claimant in question qualified for protection, but whether he or she met the requirements for relocation or a Dublin transfer (mostly to reunite with family members in other EU countries).

Table: First-instance decisions in Greece 2013-2018 (GAS)¹⁹

Year	on merits	Admissibility	total
2013	2,076	261	2,337
2014	5,964	1,453	7,417
2015	8,428	2,019	10,447
2016	9,285	15,231	24,516
2017	22,481	22,450	44,931
2018	30,748	4,834	35,582

Let us take a look at recognition rates of decisions on merits in Greece. More than half (in 2017) and about half (in 2018) of decisions on merit were negative.

¹⁵ Asylum Information Database (AIDA), "[Country report Greece](#)", March 2018.

¹⁶ ESI research in Greece in May 2018. The waiting time between submission of a claim and a decision was 62 days in Lesbos, 126 in Chios, 55 in Samos, 70 in Leros and 65 in Kos. If one adds the period between registration until submission of the claim, it is on average 3 months.

¹⁷ Greek Asylum Service, "[Asylum Service Statistical Data \(as of 28.02.2019\)](#)".

¹⁸ Greek Asylum Service, "[Asylum Service Statistical Data \(as of 28.02.2019\)](#)".

¹⁹ Greek Asylum Service, "[Asylum Service Statistical Data \(as of 28.02.2019\)](#)".

Outcome of first-instance decisions on merit in Greece 2013-2018 (GAS)²⁰

Year	Decisions	Positive	rate
2013	2,076	322	16 %
2014	5,964	1,710	29 %
2015	8,428	3,994	47 %
2016	9,285	2,700	29 %
2017	22,481	10,348	46 %
2018	30,748	15,189	49 %

On the islands

On the islands, the GAS conducts admissibility procedures to identify Dublin cases and to determine whether asylum seekers can be sent back to Turkey as a safe third country. The Greek Asylum Service takes into account only Syrians, as they enjoy temporary protection in Turkey; and only if they are not found to be vulnerable.

The following persons are considered vulnerable:

“a) Unaccompanied minors, b) Persons who have a disability or suffering from an incurable or serious illness, c) The elderly, d) Women in pregnancy or having recently given birth, e) Single parents with minor children, f) Victims of torture, rape or other serious forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence or exploitation, persons with a post-traumatic disorder, in particularly survivors and relatives of victims of shipwrecks, g) Victims of trafficking in human beings.”²¹

Vulnerable asylum seekers are eventually all taken to the mainland where their claims are examined on merit.

Of 35,358 potentially inadmissible Syrians on the islands until 7 May 2018, 26,150 (68 percent!) were declared vulnerable. 5,378 were found to have a right, under the Dublin agreement, to be transferred to another EU member states, usually because of relatives already there (family reunification). 2,478 (6 percent) were deemed fit to return to Turkey.

Among all potentially inadmissible Syrians on islands 21 March 2016 – 7 May 2018 (European Commission)²²

No return to Turkey for vulnerability reasons	26,150	68 %
No return to Turkey because of Dublin (transfer to another EU state)	5,378	14 %
No return to Turkey for other reasons	4,352	11 %
Potential return to Turkey (safe third country)	2,478	6 %
Total	38,358	

Until the end of 2018, the number of claims which were declared inadmissible, based on the safe third country principle rose from 2,478 in early May to 2,616 in December: 138 cases in eight months. Each year the Greek Asylum Service has found *fewer and fewer people* that it might send back to Turkey.

²⁰ Greek Asylum Service, “[Asylum Service Statistical Data \(as of 28.02.2019\)](#)”.

²¹ Greek asylum law, „Law 4375”, [English translation](#), Art. 14, paragraph 8.

²² European Commission, Migration Crisis Information Sheet, 8 May 2018.

Inadmissible decisions based on the safe third country principle (GAS)²³

Year	Decisions
2016	1,305
2017	912
2018	399
	2,616

The claims of all non-Syrian asylum seekers who are not found to be vulnerable or who are not to be transferred to other EU countries under the Dublin regulation are examined on merit/in substance. If the decision on merit is negative, they might be returned to Turkey. Half of all decisions on merit on the islands are negative.

Table: Asylum procedures on merits on the islands 20 March 2016 – 7 May 2018²⁴

Positive decisions ²⁵	5,414
Negative decisions	5,206
	10,620

Most asylum seekers who receive a negative decision and might therefore be sent back to Turkey from the islands appeal to appeals committees.

Between March 2016 and May 2018 7,684 people had a reason to appeal: they received either a first-instance inadmissibility decision (2,478) or a first instance negative decision on the merit of their application (5,206). Of these 6,136 *did* appeal to appeals committees (80 percent). Of these appeals committees decided 3,098 cases by 7 May 2018.

At the outset appeals committees tended to annul all decisions that sent Syrians back to Turkey as a safe third country. This changed after a decision by the Greek Council of State on 22 September 2017. The Council upheld a first-instance inadmissibility decision concerning two Syrians.²⁶

When it comes to first-instance negative decisions on merit the appeals committee have largely upheld them.

²³ Greek Asylum Service, "[Asylum Service Statistical Data \(as of 28.02.2019\)](#)".

²⁴ European Commission, Migration Crisis Information Sheet, 8 May 2018.

²⁵ Refugee status under the Geneva Convention or subsidiary protection. Greece does not grant humanitarian protection.

²⁶ 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 decisions. The number of decisions annulling the first-instance decision was 421 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 2016, p. 6.

Table: Appeals decisions on claims from the islands, 20 March 2016 to 7 May 2018²⁷

Appeals	6,136
- Decided	3,098
- Pending	599
Decisions on appeals against inadmissibility decisions (return to Turkey)	856
- Upheld first-instance decision (claimant must return to Turkey)	435
- Annulled first-instance decision (granting refugee status/referring case back to the first instance)	421
Decisions on appeals against decisions on merits (no right to asylum)	2,242
- Upheld first-instance decision (no right to asylum)	2,119
- Reversed first-instance decision, granting asylum	123

Failed appellants can further appeal to the Administrative Court of Appeals, but this is costly, there is no legal aid provided, it often does not prevent removal and it takes years to obtain a decision.²⁸

There were 435 Syrians in May 2018 who could have been sent back to Turkey. In fact, only 36 Syrians were returned by the end of 2018 on the basis that their asylum claim was found inadmissible at second instance.²⁹ The main reason is absconding – it takes too long until a decision is finally made, and people are no longer on the islands.

Among 1,806 returnees to Turkey until the end of 2018 only 42 percent had received a negative asylum decision at first instance (2 percent) or second instance (40 percent).³⁰ The others simply gave up.

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

²⁸ Asylum Information Database (AIDA), "[Country report Greece](#)", March 2018, p. 50-51.

²⁹ UNHCR, "[Returns from Greece to Turkey \(under EU-Turkey Statement\) as of 31 December 2018](#)".

³⁰ UNHCR, "[Returns from Greece to Turkey \(under EU-Turkey Statement\) as of 31 December 2018](#)".

Continuing reception problems on the islands

*Capacity and migrant population on islands as of 12 March 2019 (Greek government)*³¹

Island	Occupancy	Capacity
Lesvos	7,264	4,050
Samos	4,387	918
Chios	1,647	1,310
Leros	1,174	1,096
Kos	887	1,005
Other	63	44
Total	15,422	8,423

The hotspots on the Greek islands remain overcrowded. The capacity of the hotspots on Lesvos, Chios, Samos, Leros and Kos is 6,438. In addition, UNHCR provides 1,572 places outside hotspots, and 285 places are provided by social aid institutions and NGOs.³²

UNHCR, NGOs and other visitors repeatedly criticise the conditions in the camps. Problems range from overcrowding to lack of security, inadequate access to medical care and psycho-social support to dismal sanitary conditions.

On Samos, which hosts four times more people than its actual capacity, 1,500 people are currently living in unheated tents and shelters outside the camp.³³ UNHCR despairs about administrative and logistical chaos.³⁴ Concluding a recent briefing, Oxfam called the people on the islands “vulnerable and abandoned” by those who are responsible for protecting them.³⁵

³¹ Hellenic Republic, Ministry for Citizens' Protection. „[National situational picture regarding the islands at the Eastern Aegean Sea \(12/03/2019\)](#)”.

³² Hellenic Republic, Ministry for Citizens' Protection, „[National situational picture regarding the islands at the Eastern Aegean Sea \(12/03/2019\)](#)”.

³³ *The Guardian*, “[Greece races to move refugees from island likened to a 'new Lesbos'](#)”, 22 February 2019.

³⁴ UNHCR, “[UNHCR urges Greece to address overcrowded reception centres on Aegean islands](#)”, 31 August 2018.

³⁵ Oxfam, “[Vulnerable and abandoned](#)”, media briefing, 9 January 2019.

Transfers to the mainland

Since June 2016, UNHCR assists Greek authorities with transferring asylum seekers found to be vulnerable to the mainland, where their asylum procedure then takes place .

UNHCR-assisted transfers from Greek islands to the mainland (UNHCR)³⁶

	2016	2017	2018	2019
January	-	1,168	2,337	1,555
February	-	1,581	1,090	755
March	-	512	680	
April	-	530	1,625	
May	-	775	1,087	
June		907	994	
July		1,038	1,039	
August		1,945	1,547	
September		1,323	2,600	
October		2,067	2,255	
November		2,128	3,060	
December		3,195	3,600	
	3,790	17,169	21,914	
Total since agreement:			42,873	

However, there have been significantly more departures from the islands, which were not supported by UNHCR.³⁷

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](#).

³⁷ See UNHCR, "[Aegean Islands Weekly Snapshot 25 February to 3 March 2019](#)", which lists the transfers for five weeks, with UNHCR assisting between 32 and 67% of the transfers.

Relocation from Greece

Between the end of 2015 and March 2018, 22,000 asylum seekers “in clear need of international protection” were relocated from Greece to other EU and Schengen countries.

The official relocation programme ended in September 2017, after that only pending cases were relocated.³⁸ 12,700 asylum seekers were relocated from Italy under the programme.

Asylum seekers relocated from Greece by 15 March 2018 (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
Estonia	141
Malta	101
Cyprus	96
Croatia	60
Bulgaria	50
Slovakia	16
Czech Republic	12
Liechtenstein	10
Total	21,999

Relocations from Greece started on 4 November 2015 with 30 asylum seekers from Syria and Iraq being transferred to Luxembourg.⁴⁰ Until March 2016, when the EU-Turkey Statement was concluded, the figure did not even reach 600. Once the EU-Turkey statement was being implemented relocations from Greece picked up rapidly. During the first year of the EU-Turkey Statement, close to 10,000 people were relocated. In 2017 the number of relocations was 11,700.

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](#).

³⁹ European Commission, [“Member states’ support to Emergency Relocation Mechanism”](#), as of 30 October 2018.

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

Relocation from Greece to other EU MS⁴¹

	Cumulative no. of relocations
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

Three member states refused to participate in relocation (Austria, Hungary and Poland).⁴² Some countries could opt out, which Denmark and the UK did. Ireland decided to participate on a voluntary basis. Greece and Italy were exempted as beneficiaries.

Substantial EU assistance to Greece for migration management

Since 2015, a total of 2 billion Euro has been allocated to Greece to help it cope with refugees and migrants in Greece.⁴³ Of this funding, 1.2 billion have been allocated to international organisations and 881 million to the Greek government. The funding consists of three parts:

- **613.5 million Euro under national long-term programmes** for the budgetary period 2014-2020 from the EU's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and the Internal Security Fund (ISF) (all EU member states receive funding from these two funds).

AMIF supports the implementation of EU asylum legislation, legal migration, integration and return procedures.⁴⁴ In Greece, the focus has been on strengthening the young asylum service and appeals bodies, improving reception conditions and developing integration measures.⁴⁵

ISF focuses on border control and the fight against cross-border crime.⁴⁶

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](#)", *European Commission*, which was frequently updated and accessed by ESI at different times.

⁴² "[Member states' support to Emergency Relocation Mechanism](#)", *European Commission*, 30 October 2018, accessed 14 March 2019.

⁴³ European Commission, "[Managing Migration - EU Financial Support to Greece](#)", February 2019.

⁴⁴ European Commission, "[Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund \(AMIF\)](#)", website, accessed 14 March 2019.

⁴⁵ Greek government, "[National programme AMIF](#)", no date, and UNHCR & ECRE, "[Assessing the use of EU Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund \(AMIF\) funding at the national level 2014-2018](#)", February 2019.

⁴⁶ European Commission, "[Internal Security Fund – Police](#)", website, accessed 14 March 2019.

- **816.4 million Euro in emergency assistance under AMIF and ISF:** 548.9 million (67 percent) of this funding is given to international organisations and EU agencies for specific projects.
- **643.3 million from the Emergency Support Instrument,** which is mobilised in urgent cases to help member states facing exceptional pressures. The funding for Greece (2016-2019) has been spent exclusively on projects carried out by UN organisations and NGOs.⁴⁷

EU support to Greece for migration management (European Commission)⁴⁸

(in million Euro)

	National programmes AMIF and ISF	Emergency assistance AMIF and ISF	Emergency Support Instrument	Total
Allocated	613.5	816.4	643.6	2,073.2
Disbursed	169.5	553.4	643.6	1,366.5

Of the allocated 2 billion Euro, the Greek government was to receive 881 million. The Emergency Support Instrument and a big part of the emergency funding are paid to international organisations and NGOs.

There have been many media reports about administrative incompetence in Greece and the insufficient -use or misuse of the available funding by Greek authorities.⁴⁹ In September 2018, the EU's anti-fraud agency OLAF announced that it is investigating "alleged irregularities concerning the provision of EU-funded food for refugees in Greece".⁵⁰ The European Court of Auditors is currently conducting an audit on the overall EU response to the migration crisis in Greece and Italy.⁵¹ An earlier report, which examined the hotspot approach in the two countries, found serious shortcomings in what had been achieved by early 2017.⁵²

The EU's emergency funding has been spent on a multitude of projects providing refugees and migrants in specific places in Greece, but also nation-wide with shelter, accommodation, food and health care, and the most vulnerable with cash grants; ensuring services at the hotspots on the islands, supporting their management, and improving their infrastructure; improving sea border surveillance and sea rescue; supporting the Greek Asylum Service; strengthening the capacity of the Greek police; providing refugee children with access to education; protecting unaccompanied minors; assisting voluntary return to countries of origin; and supporting the relocation programme 2015-2017.

The largest programme is the Emergency Support to Integration & Accommodation (ESTIA), which offers accommodation in rented places and cash grants to refugees and asylum seekers.

⁴⁷ European Commission, "[Emergency support within the EU](#)", 29 January 2019.

⁴⁸ European Commission, "[Managing Migration - EU Financial Support to Greece](#)", February 2019.

⁴⁹ *The Guardian*, "[Greece has the means to help refugees on Lesbos – but does it have the will?](#)", 13 September 2018; *Refugees Deeply*, "[The Refugee Archipelago: The Inside Story of What Went Wrong in Greece](#)", 6 March 2017.

⁵⁰ *The Guardian*, "[Lesbos refugee camp at centre of Greek misuse of EU funds row](#)", 26 September 2019.

⁵¹ European Court of Auditors, "[EU Migration management: Hotspots and beyond](#)", Information on a forthcoming audit, January 2019.

⁵² European Court of Auditors, "[EU response to the refugee crisis: the 'hotspot' approach](#)", Special report no 06/2017, 25 April 2017.

ESTIA has so far received close to 500 million Euro in funding from the AMIF emergency assistance and the Emergency Support Instrument.⁵³ Under this programme, UNHCR has secured places for 26,186 individuals in 4,457 rented apartments and 19 buildings across Greece and on the islands. In total, since November 2015, 57,145 individuals have benefitted from the accommodation scheme.⁵⁴ ESTIA also provides cash assistance to refugees and asylum seekers: In January 2019, 63,853 persons (30,762 families) were recipients. Since April 2017, 102,732 people had received cash assistance.⁵⁵

⁵³ ESTIA received 135.5 million Euro in 2017, 167.5 million in 2018 and 190.5 million in 2019. European Commission, "[Managing Migration - EU Financial Support to Greece](#)", February 2019; for 2017: UNHCR, "[Greece Accommodation update – February 2019](#)".

⁵⁴ UNHCR, "[Greece Accommodation update – February 2019](#)".

⁵⁵ UNHCR, "[Greece Cash Assistance – January 2019](#)", 28 February 2019.

How Dublin helps Greece

Under the Dublin Regulation, Greece is responsible for examining the claims of almost all asylum seekers that enter its territory. Those who irregularly moved on to other EU countries should be returned to Greece and have their asylum claim processed there.

In fact, due to a ruling by the European Court of Human Rights in January 2011 on insufficient reception conditions in Greece, most EU member states suspended Dublin transfers to Greece between 2011 and 2016.⁵⁶

In December 2016, the European Commission recommended to all member states to **restart** transfers of asylum seekers to Greece from March 2017 on.⁵⁷ However, while EU member states have requested to make Dublin transfers to Greece very few people have actually been transferred: 24 since the Commission recommendation in December 2016! (and 48 in total since 2013).

Table: Dublin requests and actual transfers to Greece, June 2013 to February 2019 (Greek government)⁵⁸

Year	Incoming requests by other EU MS	Accepted	Transfers
2013	13	4	0
2014	49	19	2
2015	139	61	16
2016	5,797	2,236	6
2017	2,134	66	1
2018	9,142	233	18
2019 (-Feb.)	1,288	7	5
Total	18,562	2,626	48

Greece, on the other hand, managed to send asylum seekers to other member states under the Dublin system, mostly – 77 percent – for family reunification.

Dublin requests and actual transfers from Greece, June 2013 to February 2019 (Greek government)⁵⁹

Year	Outgoing requests by Greece	Accepted	Transfers
2013	404	246	45
2014	1,114	837	506
2015	1,092	802	747
2016	4,878	3,214	935
2017	9,563	7,823	4,577
2018	5,211	2,648	5,460
2019 (-Feb.)	1,143	458	284
Total	23,405	16,028	12,554

⁵⁶ European Court of Human Rights, “[Dublin cases](#)”, June 2016.

⁵⁷ [Commission Recommendation \(EU\) 2016/2256 of 8 December 2016 addressed to the Member States on the resumption of transfers to Greece under Regulation \(EU\) No 604/2013](#). The Dublin III Regulation (604/2013) is available [here](#).

⁵⁸ Hellenic Republic, Ministry of Migration Policy, “[Statistical Data of the Greek Dublin Unit \(7.6.2013 - 28.02.2019\)](#)”.

⁵⁹ Hellenic Republic, Ministry of Migration Policy, “[Statistical Data of the Greek Dublin Unit \(7.6.2013 - 28.02.2019\)](#)”.

Where have migrants in Greece gone?

Despite the EU-Turkey Statement and the closure of the Western Balkan route on 8 March 2016, a substantial number of refugees and migrants have managed to leave Greece irregularly, as the following calculation shows.

- **50,100** was UNHCR’s estimate of the number of refugees and migrants in Greece on 21 March 2016, three days after the EU-Turkey Statement had been concluded and two weeks after the supposed closure of the Balkan route: 44,550 on the mainland and 5,538 on the islands.⁶⁰
- **121,500** arrived since then by sea and across all land borders, until the end of 2018.

Arrivals of migrants in Greece since EU-Turkey Statement until end-December 2018 (UNHCR and Hellenic Police)

Border	Irregular crossings
Aegean Sea ⁶¹	84,210
Greek-Turkish land border ⁶²	27,444
Greek-Bulgarian border ⁶³	6,769
Greek-Macedonian border ⁶⁴	3,035
Total	121,458

This adds up to **171,600** arrivals in total. As of 31 December 2018, there were officially an estimated **71,200** refugees and migrants in Greece (56,500 on the mainland and 14,600 on the islands).⁶⁵The difference to 171,600 is **100,400**. What has happened with them?

- Look at departures from Greece since the EU-Turkey Statement until December 2018:

⁶⁰ UNHCR, “[Europe Refugee Emergency: Site locations in Greece as of 21 March 2016](#)”.

⁶¹ UNHCR, Operational Portal Refugee Situations, [Greece](#), accessed 5 March 2019.

⁶² UNHCR, Operational Portal Refugee Situations, [Greece](#), accessed 5 March 2019. The figure for 2016 has been adjusted for the first three months before the EU-Turkey Statement.

⁶³ Hellenic Police, “Detected irregular foreigners by border” [2016 and 2017](#) and [Jan.-June 2018](#), accessed 14 March 2019. As the data is not available for the whole of 2018, we have doubled the number of arrivals January to June 2018. The figure for 2016 has been adjusted for the first three months before the EU-Turkey Statement. Albanian entries have been disregarded in this table since this is circular migration.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ UNHCR, “[Fact Sheet Greece 1-31 December 2018](#)”.

Table: Departures of refugees and migrants from Greece since the EU-Turkey Statement until end-December 2018

Scheme	Departures
Returns under the EU-TR Statement	1,806
Returns under the bilateral Greek-Turkish readmission protocol ⁶⁶	600
Other forced returns ⁶⁷	14,182
Assisted voluntary return (IOM) ⁶⁸	14,000
Relocation to other EU countries ⁶⁹	21,999
Dublin transfers out of Greece ⁷⁰	10,738
Total	63,325

- According to this data, 63,300 of 100,400 people left Greece legally. This leaves **37,100** that are unaccounted for – people who most likely managed to leave Greece irregularly.

The number of 37,100 corresponds to information by EU member states such as Germany, Austria and the Netherlands that asylum seekers coming from Greece still reach them despite the supposed closure of the Western Balkan route. It also corresponds to press reports about irregular journeys across the Western Balkans, and to Frontex data about illegal crossings from the Western Balkans into the EU.⁷¹

⁶⁶ European Commission, “[Operational implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement](#)”, 5 December 2018.

⁶⁷ Own calculations based on data by the Hellenic Police (for [2016](#), [2017](#) and [Jan. to June 2018](#)) adjusted for the first three months of 2016 and the missing second half of 2018, minus Albanian returns since this is circular migration, minus voluntary returns (IOM), minus returns under the EU-Turkey Statement and minus returns under the bilateral Greek-Turkish readmission agreement.

⁶⁸ The figure for assisted voluntary returns from Greece between June 2016 (when the programme restarted) until January 2019 was 14,439. Our estimate of the figure until the end of December is 14,000. IOM, “[World Map, AVRR from Greece](#)”, accessed on 13 March 2019.

⁶⁹ European Commission, “[Member states’ support to Emergency Relocation Mechanism](#)”, as of 30 October 2018.

⁷⁰ Hellenic Republic, Ministry of Migration Policy, “[Statistical Data of the Greek Dublin Unit \(7.6.2013 - 28.02.2019\)](#)”. The figure for 2016 has been adjusted to take account of the first three months before the EU-Turkey Statement.

⁷¹ Frontex detected 5,869 illegal crossings from the Western Balkans into EU member states in 2018; 12,179 in 2017; and 21,612 from April to December 2016, but the last figure also includes people who had already left Greece and reached a Western Balkan country when the route was closed. Frontex, “[FRAN Quarterly, Quarter 4, October–December 2016](#)”, p. 8, and Frontex, “[Risk Analysis for 2019](#)”, 20 February 2019, p. 43.

Resettlement of Syrians from Turkey to EU countries

Another key pillar of the EU-Turkey Statement is the resettlement of Syrian refugees from Turkey to EU member states to support Turkey. Since the agreement, EU member states have taken in 18,100. Turkey currently hosts an estimated 3.6 million Syrian refugees.

Table: Resettlement of Syrian refugees from Turkey to EU MS, 4 April 2016 - 5 December 2018 (European Commission)⁷²

Member State	Resettled Syrian refugees from Turkey
Germany	6,447
France	3,173
Netherlands	3,153
Finland	1,342
Belgium	1,159
Sweden	1,072
Spain	440
Italy	327
Austria	210
Luxembourg	206
Croatia	152
Portugal	142
Lithuania	102
Estonia	59
Latvia	46
Slovenia	34
Malta	17
Bulgaria	13
Total	18,094

Ten EU member states have not resettled any Syrian refugees, for political reasons or due to their non-participation in Schengen: Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and the UK.

EU assistance for refugees in Turkey

EU assistance for refugees in Turkey is one of the provisions of the EU-Turkey Statement that is being implemented successfully. Turkey currently hosts around 4 million refugees of whom 3.6 million are Syrians.

The EU promised a total of 6 billion Euro – 3 billion for 2016/17 and another 3 billion for 2018/19 – to help these refugees. Out of the total, 4 billion come from the EU budget and 2 billion from EU member states based on their GNI. Of the 6 billion:

- 4.2 billion Euro have been committed as of February 2019;
- of those, 3 billion have been contracted,
- of those, 2 billion have been paid out.⁷³

⁷² European Commission, “[Operational implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement](#)”, 5 December 2018.

⁷³ European Commission, “[The EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey](#)”, fact sheet, February 2019.

The aid focuses on humanitarian assistance (46%), education (28%), health (15%), municipal infrastructure (schools, health services, water supply, sewage systems, waste disposal) and socio-economic support (skills development, training).⁷⁴

The vast majority of the projects are implemented by international organisations such as the World Food Programme, UNICEF, UNHCR and the Danish Refugee Council, among many others.⁷⁵

Some achievements to date:⁷⁶

- 1.5 million refugees receive 120 Turkish lira (20 Euro) every month via a cash card (Emergency Social Safety Net or ESSN programme). They can spend the money on anything from food to medicine and pay any bill with it. The ESSN card is given to the most vulnerable refugee families in Turkey. (The ESSN is the biggest humanitarian project that the European Union has ever funded.)⁷⁷
- 410,000 refugee children receive financial support if they go to school, as well as complementary support services 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 (6-10 Euro).⁷⁸
- 400,000 refugee children have received Turkish language training to integrate them into the Turkish school system, 60,000 students have benefitted from catch-up and back-up classes, 136 new schools are being constructed.
- Over 5 million primary healthcare consultations have been delivered, and almost 650,000 refugee infants have been vaccinated.

⁷⁴ European Commission, "[The EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey](#)", fact sheet, February 2019.

⁷⁵ For an overview of projects, see European Commission, "[EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey - List of projects committed/decided, contracted, disbursed](#)", 16 January 2019.

⁷⁶ European Commission, "[The EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey](#)", fact sheet, February 2019.

⁷⁷ ESSN, "[About the ESSN card](#)", website, date unknown.

⁷⁸ European Commission, "[Technical Assistance to the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey](#)", October 2018.