



**POLICY BRIEF** No 2021/02, FEBRUARY 10

## **GREECE'S NEED FOR A «MIGRATORY BREATH»**

THEODOR KOMPOTOS

### *Abstract*

Over the past 15 years, Europe has been facing and trying to solve an increasingly growing problem, the phenomenon of migration. Of course, the countries in the most difficult position which have gathered a great number of immigrants and refugees are those in Southern Europe, such as Greece, which are essentially the "host countries" of the European Union (EU). Although some northern European countries, such as Germany, France and Sweden, have shouldered some of the 'burden', this is not enough. It therefore appears that while migration flows continue, the EU and its member countries have not found effective and often sustainable solutions to share the problem with an ultimate goal to address it more successfully. So, the questions that arise are: What policies and actions does the EU need to pursue? How can Greece deal with this problem?



## ***Introduction***

Since the 1990s there has been an increase in migration flows not only due to the search for a better life by migrants but also by refugees from war-torn countries. In the years 2015-2016 the number arriving in the EU through mainly Italy and Greece was quite high. Greece, mainly because of its geographical location and the wish of the other member-states, through continuous financing, in accordance with the Dublin Regulation and other agreements within the framework of the EU, acts as a "wall" of the European Union. The other European states do not have the desire to accept a further number of migrants, showing a constant indifference to the decongestion of Greece. So, it can be explained why a large part of the migrants and refugees who aim to seek asylum in another European countries have been trapped in Greece, increasing the figures. In order to deal with the problem, the Greek authorities postponed the delivery of permanent social numbers, although they promised temporary social numbers to asylum seekers, but without much success. Also, in November 2019, the International Protection Act (IPA) was passed, which made the asylum process faster as it made it easier to reject asylum applications for people who did not qualify. The Greek government has made efforts to increase the number of staff working in reception and identification centers, working with the European Asylum Support Office (EASO). Moreover, while the government set out to increase the number of repatriations, it did not achieve it, as in 2019 there were almost 10,000, when in previous years there were an average of 16,000. In 2020, combined with the emergence of COVID-19, repatriations decreased even further. Another action taken by the Greek government to address the problem of Aegean Reception and Identification Centers (RICS) was the transfer of asylum applicants to mainland Greece. Changes also to the ESTIA KAI HELIOS programs have had a negative impact on the residence of migrants in the country. Thus, this policy brief will highlight an aspect of the problem of migration in Greece, namely the large concentration of migrants in the country, events that indicate the seriousness of this problem through the processing and search of information and statistics through sources such as articles, statistical data and European legislation. At the end of the text, policy proposals and actions that can be taken to better address and resolve the problem will be mentioned.



## ***Analysis***

Nowadays the number of migrants and refugees living in total across Europe has reached 22.5 million. Greece is one of the countries that, because of its geographical location and as an EU "entry", has seen the arrival of almost 1 million migrants and refugees, but most of them do not see it as a destination but as a means to find themselves in a richer country in Europe. However, obstacles to this desire are the complexity of the Greek and European immigration system, the bureaucratic obstacles as well as the great reluctance of other European countries to accept a number of migrants and relieve the countries – "gates" of the EU such as Greece in particular. More specifically, the migration flows that the country receives are relatively high, relative to its size. In 2014 43,318 refugees and migrants were admitted, in 2015 there was a spectacular increase with the number rising to 861,630 while in 2016 the number fell to 177,234. This decline continued after the EU-Turkey declaration to limit movements of irregular migrants to 39,310 in 2017, while over the next two years there is an increase of 50,208 in 2018 and 74,613 in 2019. Today, it is estimated that there are about 1,000,000 migrants in Greece, a number that includes the migrants of the 90' until today as well, but nonetheless it is a number that for the extent and economic situation of the country is disproportionate, creating problems in Greek society and economy.

## ***The problems accumulate***

The country seems to be facing great difficulties in trying to find a solution to this humanitarian crisis as the reception facilities it has set up mainly on the islands of the Eastern Aegean, which are the main hotbeds of migrants and refugees, are proving to be insufficient for their proper and dignified "hospitality". In 2019 for example, in Moria, the reception and identification centers were saturated, since from 17,000 migrants, arrived to accommodate nearly 40,000, although these facilities are designed to accommodate 6,000 people. These, in addition to being insufficient for the number of migrants and refugees the country is hosting, are also in a miserable state. The problem is quantitative and qualitative. As far as the other EU Member States, particularly those in Middle and Northern Europe, are concerned, they are refusing to accept another number of migrants and refugees. Even countries, such as Germany and France, which have accepted a significant number of migrants, for political and social reasons refuse to accept other asylum seekers. Thus, Greece in recent years has been rest assured at the European funding through the Internal Security Fund, the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, which is not capable of solving many problems. However, recent events on the islands of the Eastern Aegean show the criticality of the problem of the



large concentration of migrants and refugees that Greece face, as well as the risk of internal, social unrest.

In particular, in January 2020 residents of the island of Lesbos complained about the poor treatment of migration, the illegal arrival of migrants, the poor condition of the facilities (hotspots) as well as the large number of migrants who are on the island, with the main requirement "we want our islands back". After a few weeks, peaceful protests were also organized by a large number of migrants settled in Moria, calling for better living conditions and better facilities. In September of the same year fires broke out in migrant reception facilities in Moria, on the island of Lesbos, leaving more than 10,000 migrants homeless. Police arrested five former residents of the camp after they were considered suspects. The situation worsened at the end of February of that year, when Turkey announced the opening of its borders, which meant an increase in migration flows to Greece. However, due to the Covid-19, although initially the inflows increased, after the first cases in the country and the closure of the borders the inflows decreased again. Specifically, in 2020 there was a 13% decrease in pandemic speech across the EU while in Greece about 76%, as 15,669 people were admitted. These new developments, with the significant reduction in inflows, give the Greek authorities, with the assistance of the EU, the opportunity in a more relaxed climate to significantly reduce riots and protests and find solutions aimed at de-escalation of the problem.

### ***Recommendations***

#### ***For the European Union:***

- ***EU Member States need to reshape the European asylum system and revise the Dublin Regulation which seems to have many weaknesses.*** The primary objective of this review should be to relieve the most overworked countries of this phenomenon, such as Greece in particular. In other words, they need to create a system that achieves a fair distribution of migrants in the EU Member States, taking in the number of migrants according to their size, economic situation and population. Countries that refuse to accept migrants, such as Poland and Hungary, need to be subject to heavy financial sanctions in order to contribute financially or with human resources to the EU's effort, being its members, to help migrants start a new life with respect for the human rights.



● ***Establishing good bilateral diplomatic relations with the countries of origin of irregular migrants with the ultimate aim of repatriating and returning them.***

This is a necessary solution as the country has faced many problems in returning migrants, namely from Afghanistan, which although the EU has diplomatic relations with that country, Greece does not have diplomatic representation. The absence of a Greek embassy in Afghanistan resulted in 3,500 requests for return from the Greek side in 2017-2018 not to be occurred. So, the ultimate objective of the country should be to achieve more, and successful repatriations.

***For the Greek government:***

● ***It can take measures to reduce the illegal entries of refugees and migrants.*** It can do this by increasing the port and military border guard force, which, with the help of FRONTEX, will prevent a further increase in the number of migrants and refugees. This increased military police force can also achieve the elimination of illegal traffickers of migrants and refugees, as already with the strengthening of FRONTEX's intervention and human power, very positive results have been achieved in the fight against these irregular networks.

● ***It needs to carry out internal checks to identify irregular migrants.*** Many refugees and migrants have irregularly crossed the country's borders wanting to seek asylum, as they have not been identified in reception and identification centers. According to the 'Return Directive' (2008/115/EC), the 'Return Manual' and Regulation (EU) 2016/1953, EU Member States could deport third-country nationals residing illegally in their country (if, of course, they do not comply with the necessary conditions). Greece can do this through the police authorities. However, this action, although it has been followed in the past, has not been successful as it was implemented in the wrong way. For this reason, internal control procedures need, in order to be more effective, not to be carried out in public places frequented by foreigners but to carry out harsh checks in the workplace. This will succeed not only in identifying illegal immigrants but also illegal work. This would also result in penalties that could take the form of heavy fines to employers, acting inappropriately.



- ***Speed up the process of accepting asylum applications.*** Such an effort can be made possible by strengthening human resources in reception and identification centers for asylum seekers, through the recruitment of staff from the country as well as through the assistance of staff and other EU Member States. This can be done through better use of European funding and funds, such as asylum, MIGRATION AND INTEGRATION FUND (AMIF), INTERNAL SECURITY FUND (ISF) and EMERGENCY SUPPORT INSTRUMENT (ESI) of the EU.
- ***Aiming for greater absorption of European funding and funds.*** The country has received 2.23 billion funding from the EU since 2015. However, Greece has managed to absorb only 28% of this financial assistance by 2019. It also needs to better allocate the resources it receives from the EU and start to finance more the competent authorities for asylum and migration and less the N.G.O.s that exceed 10 and are not all so efficient. It would therefore be more effective to use these resources more in the less funded Asylum Service.

### ***Conclusion***

Although the emergence of COVID-19 has seen a significant decrease in migration flows and a de-escalation of the situation in general, it is necessary to be ready for a deterioration. This is very likely after the end of the pandemic but also because of the strained diplomatic relationship with Turkey which may, by opening its borders, lead to a significant increase in migration flows. It is therefore necessary for the Greek competent authorities, with respect for human rights and with the assistance of the EU, to take advantage of this situation in order to solve problems and malfunctions. According to the view expressed by the Vice-President of the European Commission Margaritis Schinas, "Europe cannot live in conditions of zero migration", it is important to make it clear that the aim is not to annihilate the number of migrants and refugees but to limit them in order to make them more proportionate to the extent and economic situation of the country.



## References

- Beirens Hanne, Migration policy Institute (2020), Greece's Moria Tragedy: The Crash Test for the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum[online]. Accessed on:3/12/20 Accessed on:5/12/20. Available at:  
<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/news/greece-moria-tragedy-crash-test-eu-pact-migration-and-asylum>
- Bourdaras Giorgos (2019), Greek PM unveils four-point plan for migration. Accessed on: 2/12/20. Available at:  
<https://www.ekathimerini.com/245200/article/ekathimerini/news/greek-pm-unveils-four-point-plan-for-migration>
- European Commission (2019), Managing migration, EU financial support to Greece. Accessed on:5/12/20. Available at:  
[https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/201912\\_managing-migration-eu-financial-support-to-greece\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/201912_managing-migration-eu-financial-support-to-greece_en.pdf)
- European Parliament, Irregular Migration[online].Accessed on:5/12/20.Available at:[https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwjL792CmZ\\_xAhWOsaQKHyeiAc0QFjAJegQIFhAD&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.europarl.europa.eu%2Ffactsheets%2Fen%2Fsheet%2F152%2Fimmigration-policy&usq=A0vVaw3sn5VHmnN0WgGnjXbXIEhh](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwjL792CmZ_xAhWOsaQKHyeiAc0QFjAJegQIFhAD&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.europarl.europa.eu%2Ffactsheets%2Fen%2Fsheet%2F152%2Fimmigration-policy&usq=A0vVaw3sn5VHmnN0WgGnjXbXIEhh)
- European Parliament (2020), the migration crisis in Europe. Accessed on: 10/12/20. Available at:<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/el/headlines/society/20170629STO78631/i-metanasteutiki-krisi-stin-europi>
- Hernández Joel, Migration policy institute (2020), Greece struggles to balance competing migration demands. Accessed on:8/12/20 Available at:  
<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/greece-struggles-balance-competing-migration-demands>



- Kuschminder Katie, Migration policy institute (2018), Deciding which road to take, Insights into how migrants and refugees plan onward movement. Accessed on: 28/11/20. Available at:  
[https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/MigrantDecision-makingGreece\\_Final.pdf\\_Final.pdf](https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/MigrantDecision-makingGreece_Final.pdf_Final.pdf)
- UNCHR, Annual Report (2014-2020)[online]. Accessed on:5/12/20. Available at:  
[http://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean/location/5179#\\_ga=2.240171783.543013994.1612136125-1088088185.1606653506](http://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean/location/5179#_ga=2.240171783.543013994.1612136125-1088088185.1606653506)

### ***Greek References***

- ΑΜΠΕ (2021), Λιγότεροι 13% παράνομοι μετανάστες το 2020 στην Ε.Ε. λόγω πανδημίας - 76% μείωση στην Ελλάδα. Accessed on:9/12/20 Available at:  
<https://www.naftemporiki.gr/story/1678620/ligoteroi-13-paranomoi-metanastes-to-2020-stin-ee-logo-pandimias-76-meiosi-stin-ellada>
- Γεωργοπούλου Τάνια (2020), Γόρδιος δεσμός οι επιστροφές στις χώρες προέλευσης. Accessed on:16/12/20.Available at:  
<https://www.kathimerini.gr/society/1060901/gordios-desmos-oi-epistrofes-stis-chores-proeleyxis/>
- Μουτάφης Γιώργος (2018), Προσφυγικό: Οι φορείς και οι ΜΚΟ που μοιράστηκαν το 1,69 δισ. ευρώ από την ΕΕ. Accessed on:12/12/20. Available at:  
<https://www.cnn.gr/ellada/story/150402/prosfygiko-oi-foreis-kai-oi-mko-poy-moirastikan-to-1-69-dis-eyro-apo-tin-ee>
- Πλιάκος Κώστας (2020), Μηταράκης: Μειώνονται σταθερά οι μεταναστευτικές ροές- το 2021 θα είναι έτοιμες οι δομές στα νησιά. Accessed on:18/12/20.Available at:  
<https://www.cnn.gr/politiki/story/242423/mitarakis-meionontai-stathera-oi-metanasteytik-es-roes-to-2021-tha-einai-etoimes-oi-domes-sta-nisia>





- ΤΑ ΝΕΑ ΤΕΑΜ (2019), Αξιοποιήθηκε μόνο το 28% των τακτικών κονδυλίων για το προσφυγικό. Accessed on:1/12/20. Available at:  
<https://www.tanea.gr/2019/04/11/greece/aksiopoiithike-mono-to-28-ton-taktikon-kondyilion-gia-to-prosfygiko/>