

Support refugees arriving in Greece

Since the EU-Turkey deal¹ of March 2016, reception camps for migrants and refugees arriving on Greece's Aegean Islands have become open-air prisons. According to the agreement, all new irregular migrants coming from Turkey to Greek Islands from 20 March 2016, who did not claim asylum in Greece, or those whose asylum application is rejected as inadmissible, should be returned to Turkey. For three winters, people seeking protection, including many children, have been forced to remain in unsanitary, unsafe, woeful conditions. In the past three and a half years, Greece has made very little progress towards guaranteeing migrants and refugees the minimum reception and procedural standards they are entitled to under EU law. Other Member States have been unwilling to share the responsibility of relocating migrants and refugees from Greece, placing an untenable strain on a country that is already beset by austerity measures and economic crises. Meanwhile, Turkey is holding the entire EU to ransom with threats of "opening the gates" for the close to 3.5 million refugees it hosts. Furthermore, according to an Amnesty International report, Turkey is compelling Syrian refugees to return to their war-torn home country, some in handcuffs, after receiving threats of violence or being tricked into signing "voluntary return" agreements, thereby violating the *principle of non-refoulement*, forcing people to make the dangerous land or sea crossing to Greece.

Compared to 2018, the number of sea arrivals to Greece has increased. According to UNHCR in September 2019 10.551 people arrived on the Aegean Islands and 12.720 people arrived in July and August 2019. Approximately 5% of the arrivals are unaccompanied or separated children, mainly from Afghanistan and Syria. Camp Moria on Lesbos, which was designed to house 3.000 people, is currently hosting more than 10.000. It is estimated that 80% of the population are Afghans who are likely to be eligible for refugee protection. The camp on the island of Samos is running seven times over capacity, according to UNHCR. Families sleep on cardboard on concrete floors. People queue for hours for food, water and a shower. Children are not attending school; their parents are unable to find work even if they were legally allowed to work. Access to medical aid and the asylum procedure, including legal assistance, is pitiful. Rain has washed away tents and informal structures which refugees set up themselves in the absence of sufficient formal housing for them. The dire circumstances in the camps put women and girls at serious risk of gender-based violence. The UNHCR have reported that women are regularly experiencing sexual violence and are extremely vulnerable to falling prey to human trafficking.

The EU has made insufficient commitments to guarantee the human rights of these people who are trying to find safety within our borders and has left border countries such as Greece, Italy and Spain alone in dealing with asylum seekers. The financial support it has given Greece over the past years has not been sufficient to alleviate the suffering of people stuck in these open-air prisons. Furthermore, the lack of solidarity gives credence to the conservative Greek government to pass a new asylum law that will curtail fundamental human rights. What is needed, as is shown by the ad-hoc solutions reached vis-à-vis Malta, is sustained and shared

¹ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18/eu-turkey-statement/pdf>

support to refugees across the EU. This means that migrants and refugees should be relocated equitably across all Member States within the EU, taking into account refugees' countries of choice, family ties and community links as well as members states' relative size and GDP.

Two legal instruments at the heart of the problem are in dire need of fundamental revision. The Dublin III Regulation, which places the responsibility for asylum seekers on the first Member State accessed, has been a driver for human misery in the EU's southern and Mediterranean Member States, including Greece. The EU-Turkey deal has had a similar effect by placing an unsustainable strain on Greece's already very fragile asylum system. The EU-Turkey Deal has left the EU beholden to a capricious Turkish government and turning a blind eye on the human rights violations in Turkey. The EU must stop the externalisation of its border management to border third countries such as Turkey and Libya, and guarantee legal entry channels for refugees, including through relocation within the EU, resettlement from outside the EU, humanitarian visa programmes, and use of the Temporary Protection Directive.

Reaffirming our resolution on the matter at the Council in Antwerp in 2018, the European Green Party:

1. Calls on the EU commission and Greek government to immediately make funds and means available to alleviate the humanitarian catastrophe on the Aegean Islands before the winter of 2019 makes conditions even worse.
2. Calls on the EU commission to assist Greece with such an operation.
3. Calls on the EU and its members states to agree to a more ambitious resettlement programme, and fair distribution throughout the EU, on the basis of asylum seekers' countries of choice family and social links and on the basis of Member States' GDP, population and territory size.
4. Urges the EU to create more safe passageways to Europe, including easier family reunion.
5. Calls on the EU and the Turkish government to ensure the protection of Syrian refugees in Turkey, with particular attention to the most vulnerable groups, such as LGBTIQ refugees.
6. Calls on the Greek government to stop ongoing reforms of asylum laws that are violating the right to asylum.
7. Calls on the EU member states to withdraw from the EU-Turkey Deal while continuing financial support for the Syrian refugees in Turkey.
8. Calls for a stop of the deportation of Syrian refugees into Turkey as they are facing forced relocation into Northern Syria. The Turkish, Syrian and Kurdish people should not be used as bargaining chips for any negotiations with Turkey on joint support for refugees.

9. Calls on the EU member states to unblock the urgently needed Dublin reform with a view to establish a system where responsibility is fairly shared between member states as the proposal of the European Parliament demands.

10. Welcomes the initiative of the Finnish presidency to create a "coalition of the willing" in order to make sure that the right to seek asylum in the EU is guaranteed for migrants that are rescued in the Mediterranean.