

## MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES IN GREECE

### 08/06/2021 – 21/06/2021

- The four people who had been accused of setting fire to the Moria refugee camp, were sentenced to 10 years in jail, amid criticisms of an unfair trial. Journalists had [denounced](#) that they didn't have access to the courtroom during the trial on 11 June 2021.
- On 15 June 2021, 38 organisations [wrote a letter](#) to the Greek government and to EU institutions warning that Greece's decision to consider Turkey "safe" will have serious negative consequences for refugees.
- On 9 June 2021, Doctors Without Borders (MSF) [denounced](#) the fact that 456 children, including 32 unaccompanied minors, suffered from mental health problems in Lesbos between 2019 and 2020.
- EU Commissioner for Home Affairs, Ylva Johansson, [called](#) Greek sound cannons at borders "odd" and hopes that "this is in line with fundamental rights".
- On 14 June 2021, during the NATO summit, Greek prime minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis and Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan held a [private meeting](#).

### 26/05/2021 – 7/06/2021

- On 7 June 2021, Greece [declared](#), through a joint decree of Foreign and Migration Ministries, that "Turkey is a safe country for asylum seekers from Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Somalia". According to Greek Migration Minister, Notis Mitarachi, this will facilitate the forced return to Turkey of migrants from the Greek islands.
- On 28 May 2021, Greece [launched](#) an EU-wide tender for two closed migrant facilities that will replace migrant camps on Greek islands. Council of Europe's Human Rights Commissioner Dunja Mijatovic asked earlier in May the Greek government to reconsider these closed facilities which will lead to "large-scale and long-term deprivation of liberty" with harmful effects on people and children mental health.
- On 31 May 2021, Greek Migration Policy Minister [announced](#) new, stricter legislation regarding forced returns of migrants.
- A new human rights officer at Frontex [said](#) the Agency should remain in Greece, amid allegations of pushbacks.

- Since 3 June 2021, Greece has [started](#) vaccinating refugees in the camps on the islands of Lesbos, Chios and Samos – months after the vaccination campaign started in Greece.

#### **10/05/2021 – 26/05/2021**

- On 21 May 2021, Greek Prime Minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, met with **Frontex Chief, Fabrice Leggeri**, to coordinate returns. He [described](#) the use of migrants and refugees as “geopolitical pawns to put pressure on the European Union.”
- In a [letter addressed](#) to Greek authorities, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Dunja Mijatović, calls on Greece to “put an end to pushback operations at both the land and sea borders with Turkey”, investigate allegations of pushbacks and ill-treatment of migrants, ensure an enabling environment for NGOs and improve reception conditions.
- On 12 May 2021, Greek Migration Minister, Notis Mitarakis, said he would be in favor of allowing Frontex to [operate](#) outside of European borders, in order to facilitate the return of migrants.

#### **27.04.2021 – 10.05.2021**

- On 3 May 2021, in the isolated refugee camp on the island of Chios a young asylum seeker from Somalia [died alone](#) in a tent and when the corps was found him, his body was surrounded by rats. This dreadful incident shows the inhumane and deplorable conditions in which thousands of refugees are forced to live on the Greek islands.
- On 28 April 2021, the Greek Ombudsman [published](#) the interim report of its own initiative investigation on alleged illegal pushbacks of foreign nationals from Greece to Turkey, in the area of Evros.
- On 27 April 2021, five Greek organisations, in a [letter](#) addressed to Commissioner for Home Affairs, Ylva Johansson, requested the European Commission to assess the implementation by the Greek authorities of the EU acquis and the Charter of Fundamental Rights at the Greek-Turkish land and sea borders.
- A Syrian refugee has been [sentenced](#) to 52 years in prison by a Greek Court for “illegally” entering Greece from Turkey with his family in 2020.
- Five Greek refugee camps will [adopt](#) a new EU-funded automated surveillance system which raises serious concerns in terms of privacy and well-being of asylum seekers.
- On 12 April 2021, the Legal Centre Lesvos (LCL) filed a new [complaint](#) before the European Court of Human Rights representing

11 Syrians who were part of a group of 180-200 people violently expelled from Greece to Turkey in October 2020.

- EUobserver reports that a Frontex officer wrongly [registered](#) a minor asylum seeker as an adult in 2020, which is causing continuous struggle for this person still today because of that error.
- As human rights activists [report](#), concrete walls are being built in mainland refugee camps, Diavata, Malakassa, Ritsona and Nea Kavala to further isolate and cut off refugees from the local communities and services. While the Greek government is [closing](#) the last remained model refugee camp on Lesbos, sending people who were hosted there to dire conditions in the “new Moria” camp.
- On 10-12 May 2021, an Ad-hoc sub-Committee of the [Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons](#) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe will carry out a fact-finding visit to Greece.

### **13.04.2021 – 26.04.2021**

- On 14 April 2021, Alarm Phone [denounced](#) another illegal pushback of 46 people in the Aegean Sea by Greek authorities. A man was reportedly beaten and thrown at sea by Greek authorities and was eventually rescued by the other people on the boat.
- A [new migrant camp](#) on the Greek Island of Lesbos will be built, with a standard capacity of 3,000 people, but it will be able to accommodate an additional 2,000 people. The location is yet to be confirmed, “but reports stated it will be in a remote location.”

### **29.03.2021 – 12.04.2021**

- Following EU Home Affairs Commissioner’s visit to Lesbos end of March 2021, the EU will [finance](#) five new structures on the islands of Lesbos, Samos, Chios, Kos and Leros for a total amount of EUR 250million.
- Around 50 civil society organisations [denounced](#) the systematic pushbacks at the Greek-Turkish border and called for joint actions and initiatives for the “establishment of an independent mechanism for the systematic recording and substantiation of reported push-back cases”.
- Alarm Phone [published a report](#) of 1-year documented pushbacks in the Aegean Sea and at the Evros/Meriç land border and repeated attacks against migrants.
- On 5 April 2021, a [fire broke out](#) in the Reception and Identification Centre of Vial, on the Greek Island of Chios, destroying at least 15 tents.

### **10/03/2021 – 29/03/2021**

- According to [Der Spiegel](#), since the beginning of 2020 the UN Refugee Agency has registered “several hundred cases” of alleged pushbacks and is increasing pressure on the Greek government over rights violations in the Aegean Sea.
- Protests sparked at a refugee camp in Corinth after a Kurdish asylum seeker [took his life](#) in the camp.
- A 44-year-old man from Guinea who was held in the pre-removal detention center of Kos [died](#) of peritonitis after he had suffered from severe pain for three days without any assistance.
- On 23 March 2021, the Global Legal Action Network [filed an application](#) with the European Court of Human Rights against Greek authorities for preventing a minor to apply for asylum and for illegally expelling him/her from Greece, in violation of the principle of non-refoulement and prohibition of torture.
- On 17 March 2021, the Greek Migration Minister Notis Mitarachi [called](#) on Turkey to take in 1,450 rejected asylum seekers from the Greek islands in the framework of the EU-Turkey deal. The NGO Legal Centre Lesbos [published](#) five statements, each one addressing one critical aspect of the legal consequences of the EU-Turkey deal.
- On 17 March 2021, the Greek government has been [instructed](#) by the European Court of Human Rights to guarantee the rights of three clients of the Legal Centre Lesbos, thus denouncing the poor living reception conditions in Lesbos.
- Two young Afghans were found guilty of arson for the Moria refugee camp fire and have been [sentenced](#) to five years in prison. The NGO Legal Centre Lesbos, which represents the two migrants who arrived in Greece as unaccompanied minors, denounced “the lack of credible evidence”.
- On 11 March 2021, 82 recognised refugees (i.e. people whose asylum application was granted) were [relocated](#) from the Greek island of Lesbos to Germany, in the framework of an agreement between Greece and Germany implemented in cooperation with the International Organisation for Migration.
- Recently-elected Greek President, Ekaterini Sakellariopoulou, [declared](#) that “solidarity among EU Member States, but also towards refugees, is essential”.

### **23/02/2021 – 09/03/2021**

- On 5 March 2021, Aegean Boat Report [announced](#) that three boats arrived on Lesbos and one on Chios with an unknown number of people on board. They are currently trying to hide to avoid being forcibly returned.

- More than 2,000 refugees risk being left [without shelter](#) after an EU-funded programme providing cash assistance and temporary housing to recognised refugees terminated.
- An Afghan woman set herself on [fire](#) at the temporary refugee camp of Lesbos after her family's planned relocation to Germany was postponed because of the advanced state of her pregnancy. She is now formally charged with arson by Greek authorities.
- On 25 February 2021, the EUobserver [reported](#) that "three families from Afghanistan appear to have been abducted from a Greek asylum camp, robbed, beaten, and then illegally deported back to Turkey".
- On 23 February 2021, a 6-year-old refugee boy [died](#) in a fire that broke out in a refugee camp outside Athens. While residents in the Greek islands of Lesbos [showed](#) solidarity with refugees living on the islands in desperate conditions and amid freezing temperatures and call on locals to host them in their homes.
- Romania [denies](#) helping Greece pushing migrants back to Turkey in the Aegean Sea, despite evidence.
- On 19 February 2021, Greece [requested](#) the help of Frontex and the EU for the return of 519 migrants to their countries of origin, including Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Egypt, Algeria and Iran.

#### **08/02/2021 - 22/02/2021**

- On 19 February 2021, another fire erupted in Kara Tepe camp on Lesbos, Greece, due to electrical misuse, Doctor Without Borders [reported](#).
- On 17 February 2021, 116 refugees were [relocated](#) from Lesbos, Greece, to Germany, in the first direct relocation flight from a Greek island to an EU country. A recently released joint [Oxfam & Greek Council for Refugees briefing paper](#) explore the failure of EU Member States in responsibility- and solidarity-sharing in terms of relocations from Greece.
- On 10 February 2021, Migration and Asylum Minister, Notis Mitarakis, [declared](#) his intention to revise the EU-Turkey statement and expand its geographical scope thus allowing to return migrants to Turkey also from the land border and not only from the Aegean islands.
- The NGO Legal Centre Lesbos [released its new report](#) based on evidence shared by over fifty survivors of collective expulsions in the Aegean Sea. On 15 February 2021, Legal Centre Lesbos and Front-Lex [sent a formal request](#) to Frontex Chief to suspend or terminate Frontex activities in the Aegean Sea.
- The NGO Mare Liberum [released its 2020 Pushback Report](#) where they counted at least "321 pushbacks in the Aegean Sea, with some 9,798 people

pushed back". On 15 February 2021, Greek Migration Minister, Notis Mitarakis, [denied](#) once again the accusations of pushbacks from Greece to Turkey, labelling them as "fake news".

- Doctors Without Borders d the alarming mental health situation of children in the Greek hotspots, reporting "50 cases of children with suicidal ideation and suicide attempts" in 2020. [According to a Greek NGO](#), the Greek asylum system contributes to retraumatizing victims of torture.
- As heavy snowstorms, flood and freezing temperatures hit Greece, concerns are raised for [migrants living in tents](#) in the camps. Some of them were transferred to temporary shelters in Athens.

### 21/12 2020 - 8/2 2021

- The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) [has asked](#) the Greek government to reply on the treatment of asylum seekers in the refugee camps in the islands of Lesbos and Kos, given the **degrading and inhumane living conditions** in these camps. At the same time, the Higher Administrative Court of North Rhine-Westphalia, in Germany, [prohibited the return](#) of refugees from Germany to Greece due to the inhumane and harsh conditions they face in refugee camps in Greece.
- A group of Greek NGOs, including the Greek Council for Refugees, [denounced](#) that many of the provisions on the border and pre-screening procedures contained in the EU Pact on Migration are very similar to those introduced in Greece with a new asylum law in recent years. They published a correlation table presenting "a point-by-point comparison of the main provisions of the Screening Regulation proposal with relevant domestic legislation", with a view to "preventing the entrenchment of failed and violent border policies in the 'new' EU Pact".
- A group of migrants, after reporting they have been attacked, tortured and beaten by the police in the Paranesti detention center, [started](#) a hunger strike on 30 February 2021.
- On 6 February 2021, residents of the Greek island of Chios continued to against the creation of a new closed migrant camp which will have a capacity of 1500 places.

### 13/01/2021 - 25/01/2021

- Human Rights Watch [publishes](#) its 2020 Greece Report.
- On 14 January 2021, Greek migration minister, Notis Mitarachi, called on the European Commission and Frontex to help in the "immediate [return](#)" of [around 1 500 rejected asylum seekers](#) to Turkey under the framework of the 2016 EU-Turkey statement. In 2020, [139 migrants](#) were returned to Turkey under the Statement and the returns are currently suspended due

to the pandemic. Turkey has been [refusing](#) Greek requests so far. According to the Greek Migration Minister, migrants' arrivals [decreased](#) by 80% in 2020.

- HIAS Greece [reported](#) that starting from 11 January 2021, and for the first time in 4 months, "the Regional Asylum Office of Lesbos will begin notifying applicants on Lesbos with first instance rejections and will also start accepting appeals against these decisions. However, the procedure is restarting without the guarantee of state free legal aid from the Register of Lawyers of the Asylum Service".
- On 18 January 2021, after a snowstorm, around 7,500 people in the Kara Tepe camp are [living](#) in freezing weather, under the snow and in extremely dire conditions.

## 21/12 2020 -12/1 2021

- On 27 December 2020, Alarm Phone [denounced](#) another violent **pushback in the Evros** region where around 20 people were beaten and pushed back by Greek border guards from Greece to Turkey. On 24 December 2020, Alarm Phone [reported](#) that around 30 people on a boat in distress in the **Aegean Sea** were pushed back to Turkey by the Greek Coast Guard, following several other boats reportedly pushed back in the Aegean in the previous days.
- On 26 December 2020, a centre hosting unaccompanied children aged 12-15 in Oraiakastro, Thessaloniki, [was attacked](#) by racists with sticks, knives and iron bars. Four minors were injured and brought to the hospital.
- An internal document [seen by Der Spiegel](#) suggests that German Interior Minister, Horst Seehofer, covered Greek Coast Guards criminal practice of abandoning and pushing backs asylum seekers at sea.
- On Christmas' Eve, asylum seekers stuck in a limbo on the Greek island of Lesbos [wrote a letter](#) directly to EU Commission's President Ursula von der Leyen and to EU policy makers, for the first time, denouncing their dramatic situation.
- NGOs and media [denounced](#) that the EU-funded refugee camp near Athens, known as the "new Malakasa" and built in March 2020, hosts around 1,000 people in deplorable conditions, with no water and heating. Children there do not have access to education and women report cases of violence and sexual harassment. The camp is co-financed under the EU Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), amounting to around EUR 4.7 million.

- On 17 December 2020, 86 refugee children, with serious health problems, have been [transferred](#) from Greece to Germany.
- A recently published [research](#) from the International Rescue Committee showed how the EU-funded hotspots on the Greek islands are causing severe mental health conditions on asylum seekers and refugees, including “depression, post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and self-harm among people of all ages and backgrounds”.
- On 12 December 2020, three Greek border guards and one policeman have been [suspended](#) for “use of violence against people during control check” for violently beating two refugees on the island of Lesbos.
- [Heavy floods](#) hit the refugee camp on Lesbos built after the fire in Moria. More than 7,000 refugees are stuck there in inhumane conditions, without heat, sanitation and electricity.

#### **24/11 – 08/12 2020**

- On 4 December 2020, Greece [announced](#) that 7,200 migrants, who have been kept in temporary camps since the Moria fire, will be transferred to new facilities by September 2021. The Commission is supporting Greece in the construction of these new camps on the islands for a total budget of EUR 250,000.
- On 2 December 2020, 32 people were [rescued](#) off the coasts of Lesbos when their boat capsized: one woman died while another is still missing.

#### **12/11 – 23/11**

- On 19 November 2020, the Council of Europe’s anti-torture committee (CPT) [published](#) the report of a visit to Greece in March 2020. The report raised concerns on the “appalling conditions” in which families with children, unaccompanied and separated children and other vulnerable persons have been detained. It called on Greek authorities to “reform its immigration detention system and stop pushbacks”. While, *EUobserver* [reveals](#) a Greek operation at the Greek-Turkish border to “keep out migrants”.
- New closed [immigration facilities](#) will be built on the islands of Samos, Kos and Leros with the financial support of the European Commission. On 18 November 2020, Greek Migration Minister presented these camps as “new, better-equipped, reception centres for asylum seekers”, which will be [functional](#) on the Greek islands.
- The *EUobserver* [reported](#) that new evidence “clearly shows that the Hellenic Coast Guard (HCG) received orders to push migrants back into Turkish territorial waters”.

- Following the death of his six-year-old child in an attempt to reach the Greek island of Samos from the Turkish coast, a father was [charged](#) by Greek authorities with endangering his son's life and risks 10 years in prison.

## 29/10 – 10/11

- On 7 November 2020, a **shipwreck** off the island of Samos was [reported](#). Two pregnant women and two children are missing.
- Concerns were raised over new rules [announced](#) on 5 November 2020 in the new camp on Lesbos, including the possibility to suspend housing/reception conditions in case of non-compliance with the rules.
- On 3 November 2020, the NGO Aegean Boat Report [published](#) its October 2020 Report where they documented 34 illegal pushbacks in the Aegean Sea. While, according to the NGO Mare Liberum, 8,521 people have been [illegally pushed back](#) in the Aegean Sea since March 2020.
- On 30 October 2020, 66 people, including 18 minors, were [relocated](#) to Germany from Greece.

## 15/10 – 26/10

- The German newspaper *Der Spiegel* has [shown](#) the unlawful practice of the EU border control agency, **Frontex**, of systematically helping the Greek coastguard **illegally push back** refugee boats into Turkish waters. The European Parliamentary group GUE/NL [strongly calls](#) for the immediate resignation of Frontex' Chief, Fabrice Leggeri.
- The NGO Alarm Phone released its Aegean Regional Analysis [Report](#).
- The NGO Human Rights 360° published [a new report](#) on "Defending human rights in times of border militarization" with a focus on the Greek-Turkish border at the **Evros river**. Forensic Architecture, in partnership with Human Rights 360°, reconstructed various [incidents of pushbacks](#) at the Evros river, using a technique called '[situated testimony](#)'.
- Increased **securitisation** at the Greek-Turkish border at the Evros river: 400 guards will be deployed to patrol the border, a 62.9-million-euro steel fence with barbed wire [will be completed](#) by April 2021, it will be five meters high and have a total length of 27 kilometres. According to [reports](#), two **sound canons** will also be installed, that "emit powerful sound waves which may cause pain and shock to the human body".
- BBC NewsNight [investigates](#) the events surrounding the blaze in the Moria refugee camp.
- The Greek Minister of Immigration and Asylum [applies quarantine measures](#) only for asylum seekers hosted in the Vial refugee camp in **Chios**, while excluding the camp's employees from the quarantine. On Thursday

22 October 2020, the Minister [announced](#) that the lockdown in Vial was extended until 4 November 2020. [MSF denounces](#) the dire conditions of the Vathy camp in **Samos** (which is under quarantine measures) and calls for the immediate evacuation from the island of “elderly people and those with chronic and complex medical conditions”.

- The European Court of Human Rights, following an application for **interim measures**, has [requested](#) that the Greek Government submit all information (by 22 October) on the decision to close the accommodation facility **PIKPA** at **Lesvos**.
- Four German [journalists were detained](#) for 7 hours and mistreated by the police because they were producing a documentary on migration on **Samos**.
- The NGO Aegean Boat Report [denounced](#) that 59 people were put by the Greek Coast Guard into two overcrowded **life rafts** outside **Lesvos** and left adrift for hours on 18 October 2020. They were eventually rescued by the Turkish Coast Guard.
- On 23 October 2020, the NGO Alarm Phone [reported](#) that “197 people have been reportedly beaten and pushed-back from Crete to Turkey by the Hellenic Coast Guard, their phones were stolen and they were left adrift in inflatable life rafts”.

## 28/09 – 09/10

- In September, an estimated 400 refugees who had previously left Lesvos [have returned](#) from the mainland to the island.
- [Tensions at Greece’s Malakasa migrant camp](#) after officials reported the first death of a migrant in the country due to **COVID-19**.
- On 30 September 2020, 4 asylum seekers were [rescued by Turkish authorities](#) after they had been pushed back by Greek coast guards. On 1 October 2020, 59 people, including children, were [rescued](#) by the Hellenic Coast Guard of the islands of Crete.
- In a clear attempt to criminalise NGOs’ activities, the Greek government prepared a case file [against 33 NGO members](#) including offences of “forming and joining a criminal organisation, espionage, violation of state secrets”. [Alarm Phone released a statement](#) on the Greek government’s criminalisation campaign against NGOs. On 6 October 2020, 29 human rights and humanitarian aid organisations, including the Greek Council for Refugees, pressed in [an open letter](#) the Greek Parliament to open an inquiry into allegations of pushbacks and violence at borders.
- Dutch citizens of the *Let’s Bring Them Here* movement (*We Gaan Ze Halen*) have [rented a plane](#) to begin airlifting refugees from Lesvos by themselves. They are into [negotiations with the Greek and Dutch governments](#) to

evacuate 189 refugees from the Greek island and bring them to the Netherlands.

- On 8 October 2020, heavy floods hit the Kara Tepe emergency centre. Around 7,800 refugees and asylum-seekers who were evacuated there from Moria are currently hosted in dire conditions. [UNHCR and other humanitarian organisations](#) have called on the Greek authorities for immediate action.