

Migration in Greece: Recent Developments in 2018

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Abstract

This report was prepared for the annual meeting of the OECD network of international migration experts. The report presents the evolution of the migrant and asylum seeking population in Greece in terms of both stocks and flows. It discusses issues of border control and asylum processing. It reviews the situation of immigrants in the Greek labour market and their overall insertion in Greek society, and outlines the initiatives taken and challenges faced by recently arrived asylum seekers. Last but not least, the report discusses issues of xenophobia and racism in the country. The aim of this report is to comment on the overall migration and asylum seeking situation in Greece, signal important policy developments and offer a critical analysis of those.

Keywords: migration, asylum, crisis, Greece, labour market, borders, Europe.

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Executive Summary

Overall Economic Outlook Improving...

August 2018 has marked the end of Greece's economic tutelage by the IMF and the EU which has lasted nearly a decade (since late 2009). Oversight of the country's public finances and economic growth of course continues but at least on paper the country has returned to normality. Nonetheless frugality policies, heavy taxes, and welfare reforms continue as public finances even if stable, remain fragile and so is the economy. In the first quarter of 2018 economic growth stood at 2.3%, while unemployment stood at 19% in June 2018 (down from 21.3% in June 2017) and employment grew at a rate of 3.7%, showing an increase of 1.8% compared to the same period last year. However, Greece still records the highest unemployment rate among Eurozone countries, with youth unemployment standing at 31.9% in June 2018.

...but Renewed Emergency as Immigration Flows Grow

While the refugee emergency of 2015-2016 had receded after spring 2016, and 2017 was marked by low arrivals of new asylum seekers and irregular migrants at the country's borders, 2018 has seen a new rise in immigration and asylum seeking flows both through the Greek Turkish sea borders (arrivals on the Aegean islands) and through the Greek Turkish land border, up north. Currently there are an estimated 62,000 newly arrived asylum seekers and immigrants in Greece of which one third (just under 20,000) on the Aegean islands, and two thirds in the mainland. Those in the mainland are in various accommodation schemes including rented flats, shelters, and camps.

In 2017 the Greek asylum systems registered just under 60,000 applications (58,642). During the first 8 months of 2018 there were over 40,000 applications lodged (41,358, accounting for a 5.8% increase compared to the same period in 2017). The trend is clearly rising: total irregular migrant/asylum seeker arrivals through the first week of September 2018 (20,430) surpassed arrivals to Italy, a development that happens for the first time since the EU Turkey statement implementation in late March 2016 (Solidarity Now Newsletter, September 2018).

At the same time, the islands, particularly Lesbos, are bursting again with high numbers of asylum seekers or irregular migrants who remain "trapped" there in function of the EU-Turkey statement. Nonetheless, few have been returned to Turkey (1,738 from April 2016 to 30 September 2018) (UNHCR, October 2018) and some 5,289 refugees have been transferred to mainland Greece, from June 18 to September 2, 2018, after an assessment of their vulnerable status and with a view of easing the pressure and the very poor living conditions inside the refugee camps on the islands. Indeed, the pace of returns in the framework of the EU-Turkey agreement is very slow. This situation has led to an increase of backlog of asylum applications, which in turn is putting high pressure on the already problematic pre-return processing and limited detention capacity in Greece (European Commission 2017).

While 2017 had been marked by the closing of refugee camps and moving people to suitable accommodation, and the submission of relocation claims to other EU countries, 2018 has seen the reopening of camps in northern Greece due to new arrivals also through the Greek Turkish land border. Indeed, irregular crossings via the Turkish land border into the Evros region increased by 80%, with around 2,170 new arrivals in the first half of 2018 (FRA, July 2018), while in 2017, the number of arrivals reached 5,677 persons – representing an approximately 50% increase compared to 2016 (Petraou et. al. 2018, p. 13; UNHCR 2018).

Asylum Processing

During the period Jan. 2017- Aug. 2018 19,500 asylum seekers were granted refugee status or subsidiary protection (with an average recognition rate of 47%), compared to less than 3,000 in 2016 (with an average recognition rate of 29.1%). This increase is largely attributed to the improved capacity of the Asylum Service to process cases. However, in 2017-2018 the challenges have remained with regard to asylum seekers facing delays while in detention facilities, that in some cases waiting more than six months for an appointment to lodge their application (AIDA 2018, p. 28).

Dire Living Conditions for Asylum Seekers on the Islands

These circumstances along with extremely poor reception and living conditions in various hotspots in Greek islands have fuelled tensions among asylum seekers and between asylum seekers and locals, and protests have taken place in several Reception and Identification Centre (FRA, February 2018, p. 10). Protests against inadequate reception conditions took place in the Reception and Identification Centre in Lesbos and Chios, leaving several injured. In Chios, residents blocked the government's efforts to expand the Reception and Identification Centre with additional prefabricated housing units (ibid).

In Moria's camp alone, around 9,000 people live in a space designed for just 3,100. The extremely poor conditions under which people live has not improved during the past months. Despite efforts to alleviate the situation through transferring the most vulnerable to the mainland, as arrivals continue the situation remains unacceptable and the pressure high. Those arriving currently at Lesbos for instance, may have to wait until March (2019) for an interview. Independent media and non-governmental organisations have accused the Greek government and EU authorities that they use the aberrant conditions at Lesbos and the other islands as a deterrence factor (The New York Times, 2nd October 2018). In addition there have been allegations – and an inquiry is currently taking place – for mismanagement of the funds. On the other hand, processing and integrating those tens of thousands of asylum seekers and migrants already transferred to mainland Greece advances slowly and with significant challenges in terms of capacity of the public services and civil society organisations as well as the willingness of the asylum seekers themselves to stay in Greece.

Integration of recently arrived asylum-seekers

While the situation on the islands remains bleak to say the least, important positive developments take place on the mainland with regard to children of asylum seeking families who are participating in an increasing number of education projects both within camps or in special facilities but also gradually within mainstream schools. There are also several employment, language learning, legal assistance and health service provision programmes run by non-governmental organisations in Athens, Thessaloniki as well as medium sized cities.

Emigration of Greeks and Return Migration of Foreigners

Beyond the resurgence of 'refugee emergency' and related flows, Greece has been overall losing population of both natives (citizens) and settled migrants. Greeks, particularly those educated, have been emigrating to other EU countries in significant numbers and the settled migrant population has also been decreasing. According to Eurostat (2018, p. 3) the share of

Greek citizens of working age (20-64) living in another Member State in 2017 (as % of their home-country resident population in the corresponding age group) reached 6.0%, showing an increase of 1.4% from 2007 to 2017. In addition formerly settled migrants have also continued leaving the country. It is estimated that more than 120,000 non-EU nationals left the country over the years 2014 to 2016 alone (EL.STAT 2017). Despite the lack of reliable estimates by nationality, it appears that the negative migration balance is mainly related to the return migration of people from Albania, Ukraine, Moldova and Russia to their places of origin. According to EL.STAT (2018) in 2017 the permanent resident population in Greece was slightly under 10.8 million (10.768.193), having decreased by 0,14% compared to 2016 (10.783.748) mainly because of out-migration.

Concluding Remarks

While Greece seems to be entering a path of financial stability as regards its public finance, and the overall growth and employment situation is gradually improving, the challenges it faces on the immigration and asylum seeking front have all but receded. Immigration and asylum seeking flows via the Greek Turkish sea and land borders have increased during 2018, leading to the re-opening of emergency accommodation in hotels and camps (that had been used in the 2015 emergency but were since abandoned).

At the same time it is important to note that Greece has a stable, well settled migrant population which by now holds long term permits at a 40% rate. Interestingly such permits along with family reunification permits form now the vast majority of all stay permits for third country nationals residing in Greece. In addition the naturalisation provisions that came into effect in 2015 have led to increasing numbers of citizenship acquisitions mostly by children born in Greece or who came to the country at a young age and have attended Greek schools (33,000 naturalisations in 2017 of which about 2/3s were for children of the second or 1.5 generation). Befallen irregularity and permits on exceptional grounds have also been decreasing testifying to the stabilisation of the long term settled population in the country.

These developments suggest that Greece is faced with a bifurcated migration reality. On one hand a long term settled population that has changed the ethnic demographic composition of the citizenry and of the resident population and which has increasingly been socio-economically integrated, and on the other hand, a recently arrived population of mostly asylum seekers that remains in precarious living conditions even if efforts are made to stabilise and integrate it. A related challenge remains the islands where tens of thousands of people are stuck, without good prospects of either going forward or going back, in inhumane living conditions. It appears that the situation on the islands will not improve significantly in the months to come because the dire conditions there and the limited hope for transfers to the mainland or other countries act as deterrence factors to those who seek international protection outside the Middle East. However, even if managing the flows is a legitimate policy objective both at the national (Greek) and the EU level, it is not legitimate nor acceptable to keep people in inhumane conditions, lacking access to basic facilities, for months on end. This is of course a moral and political dilemma for both Greece and the entire EU.

1. Introduction

August 2018 has marked the end of Greece's economic tutelage by the IMF and the EU which has lasted nearly a decade (since late 2009). Oversight of the country's public finances and economic growth of course continues but at least on paper the country has returned to normality. Nonetheless frugality policies, heavy taxes, and welfare reforms continue as public finances even if stable, remain fragile and so is the economy. In the first quarter of 2018 economic growth stood at 2.3% (European Commission, July 2018), while unemployment stood at 19% in June 2018 (down from 21.3% in June 2017) and the employment grew at a rate of 3.7%, showing an increase of 1.8% compared to the same period last year (EL.STAT 2018). However, Greece still records the highest unemployment rate among Eurozone countries, with youth unemployment standing at 31.9% in June 2018 (Eurostat, June 2018).

With regard though to the 'refugee emergency' the situation appears complicated and volatile. Flows have increased in 2018 along both the Greek Turkish sea borders (arrivals on the Aegean islands) and the Greek Turkish land border, up north. The trend is clearly rising: total irregular migrant and asylum seeker arrivals through the first week of September 2018 (20,430) surpassed arrivals to Italy, a development that happens for the first time since the EU Turkey statement implementation in late March 2016 (Solidarity Now Newsletter, September 2018). While 2017 had been marked by the closing of refugee camps and moving people to suitable accommodation, and the submission of relocation claims to other EU countries, 2018 has seen the reopening of camps in northern Greece and around the country.

This report offers an overview of the immigrant population in Greece, its size and main socio-demographic features, as well as its labour market participation. Special attention is paid to the current situation as regards the flows of asylum seekers and irregular migrants through the Greek Turkish sea and land borders as these have increased in 2018. The report outlines the main developments in migration and asylum policy more generally and the challenges that the country is facing with regard to emigration.

2. The Migrant Population in Greece

The 2011 national census¹ data registered 713,000 third-country nationals² and 199,000 EU citizens (non-Greek) living in Greece accounting, respectively, for 6.5% and 1.8% of the total resident population – hence a total of 8.3% of the resident population in the country.

According to the Ministry of Migration Policy statistics on valid stay permits, the total number of third country nationals (TCNs) legally residing in Greece in 31st August 2018 was 520,260 (table 1 and figure 1).

¹While the national census of 2011 does not provide the most up to date data for 2016, it is worth consulting as regards the total migrant population residing in Greece as it does not distinguish between legal and undocumented residents. Even though one might consider that recent arrivals were not registered as at all probability they lacked a fixed domicile.

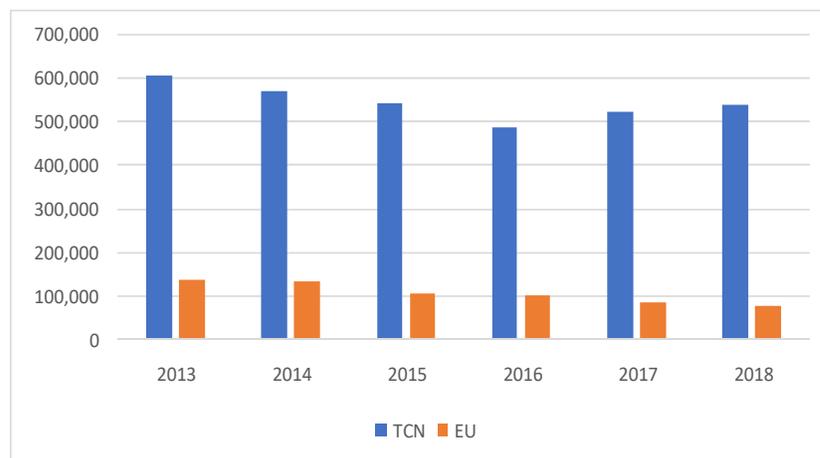
² The largest immigrant groups were Albanians (364,132), Bulgarians (31,569), Romanians (23,208), Pakistanis (15,347), Georgians (13,915), Ukrainians (11,059), followed by Russians (11,010), and finally Poles (8,384). It should be noted again here that data provided by LFS are mostly indicative, as they tend to sub-sample smaller and less visible nationalities and hence present sampling bias.

Table 1: Stock of foreign population in Greece, 2018 (31st of August)

	Size of immigrant stock	% of total resident population
Total TCN population	520,260*	4.84
Total EU28 countries' citizens (non-Greeks)	76,600**	0.71
Total immigrant stock	596,860	5.55
Total population in Greece	10,738,868***	100.00

Sources: *Ministry of Migration Policy, database of permits for TCNs/**Eurostat LFS Database, 2018 (Q2)***Eurostat database on population change, 2018.

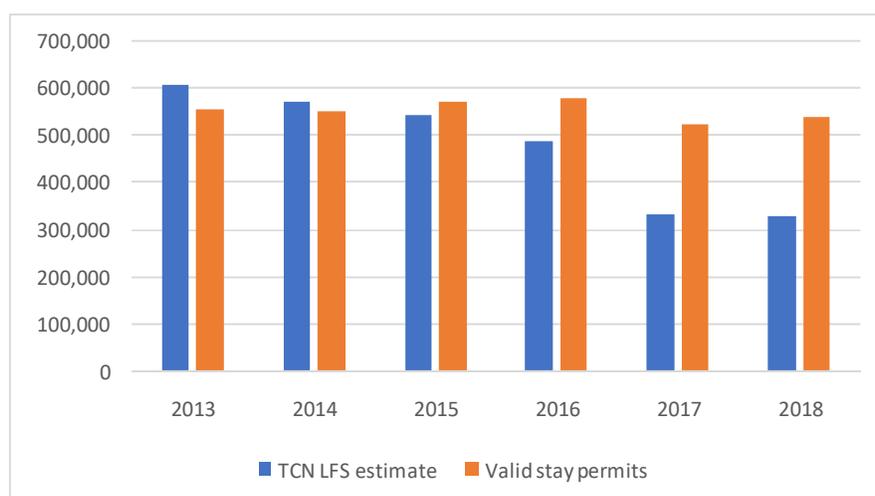
Figure 1: Stock of foreign population in Greece, 2013-2018



Source: Ministry of Migration Policy database on stay permits/EL.STAT. and Eurostat, Labour Force Survey, 2nd Quarter of each year.

More recent data from the 2018 Labour Force Survey (2nd Quarter) suggests a slight decrease in the total migrant population (aged 15 or older), with 328,300 third country nationals (TCNs) (compared to 331,700 in 2017) and 76,600 EU citizens (non-Greeks) (compared to 74,600 in 2017), corresponding to 3.6% and 0.83%, respectively, of the total resident population in Greece (4.43% of the same age cohort (figure 2).

Figure 2: Migrant population stocks in Greece, 2013-2018, comparing LFS and Stay Permit Data



Source: Data for 2012-2015 provided by the Ministry of Migration Policy, upon request. Data for 2016-2018 are available online/EL.STAT. and Eurostat, Labour Force Survey, 2nd Quarter of each year.

A closer look at the valid stay permits for TCNs as provided by the Ministry of Migration Policy in August 2018 (table 2) point to a lower number of third country nationals, notably 540,260 persons, showing a small decrease of 2.9% comparing to 2017 (556,586) and 2016 (579,736), while the gender distribution's analogy remains at the same level (figure 3).

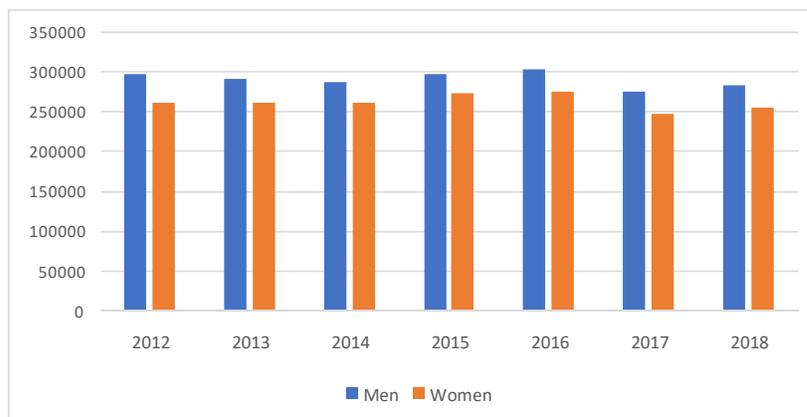
Table 2: Valid stay permits for third-country nationals by gender, 2013-2018

Valid Stay permits TCNs	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Men	292,460	288,837	298,800	303,289	291,785	284,577
Women	262,292	261,824	273,569	276,447	264,801	255,683
Total	554,752	550,661	572,369	579,736	556,586	540,260

Source: Data for 2013-2015 provided by the Ministry of Migration Policy, database of permits for TCNs upon request, while data for 2016-2018 are available online.

Note: Data refer to 31 December of each year. Data for 2018 refer to 31 August.

Figure 3: Legal migrants (stock) Greece by gender, 2012-2018



Source: Data for 2012-2015 provided by the Ministry of Migration Policy, database of permits for TCNs, upon request. Data for 2016-2018 are available online
Note: Data refer to 31 December of each year. Data for 2018 refer to 31 August.

Looking actually at the evolution of stay permits data, we would presume that the migrant population in Greece is undergoing a period of stabilisation and long-term integration. The numbers do not change much and as we shall see below the number of long term stay permits has considerably increased, along with naturalisations too (particularly for the second and the 1.5 generation – i.e. children born in Greece or who arrived in Greece in their early school years).

3. Composition and Features of the Immigrant Population

An estimated 68% of Greece’s foreign population is Albanian, while the second largest group are Bulgarian nationals, although the numbers of EU citizens residing in Greece are not included in the database of Ministry of Integration Policy. Thus, the estimation of EU national residing in Greece is based on the 2011 Census. Georgians and Ukrainians are the third and fourth largest communities according to TCN’s database on valid permits (table 3). While data on valid permits between June 2017 - June 2018 provide for the most accurate picture concerning the third-country nationals’ population, the 2011 census data are a useful source of comparison.

Table 3: National Composition of the Migrant Population (top 15 nationalities)

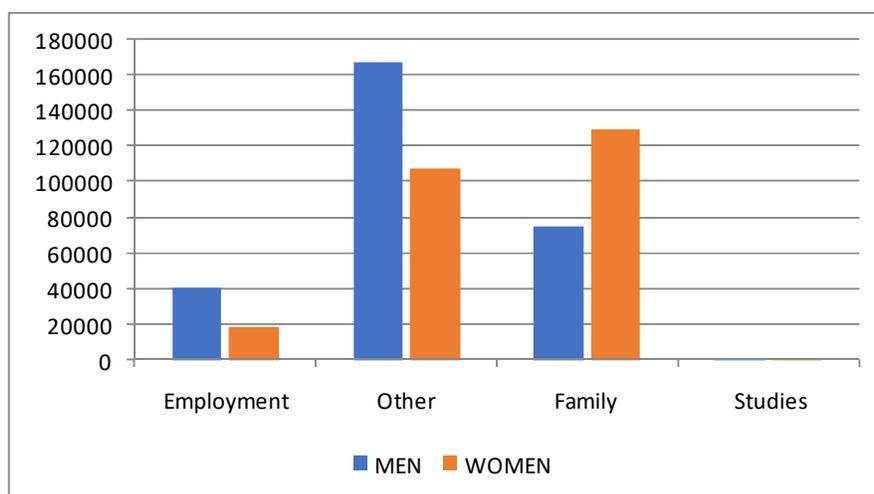
Country of Origin	Population	TCN valid permits 2017-2018			
	Census 2011	on 31.08.2017		on 31.08.2018	
	Number	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Albania	480,851	383,821	68.96	362,825	67.16
Bulgaria	75,917				
Romania	46,524				
Pakistan	34,178	16,495	2.96	17,813	3.29

Georgia	27,407	19,054	3.42	20,313	3.76
Ukraine	17,008	19,442	3.49	18,703	3.46
UK	15,388				
Cyprus	14,448				
Poland	14,145				
Russia	13,809	14,934	2.68	14,759	2.73
India	11,333	14,067	2.54	13,822	2.56
Bangladesh	11,076	6,699	1.20	8,114	1.51
Germany	10,782				
Egypt	10,455	11,970	2.15	11,967	2.21
Moldova	10,391	8,618	1.55	7,915	1.47
OTHER	80,056	61,486	11.05	64,029	11.85
TOTAL	912,000	556,586		520,260	100

Sources: Hellenic Statistical Authority (EL.STAT.)/ National Census Data 2011/
Ministry for Migration Policy, Valid Residence Permits on 31 August 2017 and 2018.

Concerning the purpose of third-country nationals' stay in Greece (figure 4), 57% of men hold permits of the 'other category', which includes permits of 10-year or indefinite duration as well as permits for humanitarian or exceptional reasons, followed by permits for family reunification (29%) and residence permits for employment purposes (14%).

Figure 4: Stay permits by gender and purpose



Source: Graph compiled by the authors on the basis of database on residence permits on 31 August 2018, Ministry of Migration Policy.

The majority of women hold family reunification permits (54%) followed by "other" category permits (38%) and employment permits (7%). Student permits are considerably lower in number. There is a clear shift here of the permits from those of employment (for men) and of family reunification (for women) into those of 10-year or indefinite duration which suggests that the migrant population in Greece is stabilised and largely long-term

settled in the country. This shift also attests to the fact that migrants have faced similar unemployment and underemployment challenges as native workers in the last few years.

As an important step toward integration, the Migration Code (L4251/2014, Article 7) in the category of long-term migration permits includes the following types of permits: the 10-year long permit, the second generation permit, the permit of indefinite duration, and the long-term resident permit (table 4). More specifically, the long-term resident permits refers to EU long-term resident status (as defined in 109/2003 EC). The permits of 10-years and indefinite duration reflect national long-term permits and do not constitute subcategories of the EU long-term permit. In other words, all four types constitute long-term residency arrangements.³ Currently the goal is to unify all long-term residence permits under the EU long-term resident status (L4251/14, no 138) thus 10-year permits are no longer renewed automatically as in the past but are converted to the EU long-term resident status when the conditions are met.

Table 4: Long-term permits, by type and gender 2013-2018

Type of stay permit	2013		2014		2015		2016		2017		2018 (31 August)	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
10 year	66,740	36,092	77,051	43,132	82,771	46,159	84,863	47,550	63,732	49,315	88,527	50,965
2nd gen.*	2270	1,890	11,217	10,130	18,356	16,478	19,299	16,414	20,447	11,079	16,653	13,079
Indefinite duration	30,172	6113	25,007	5,455	20,842	4,829	18,812	4,362	17,731	3,496	16,429	3,593
Long-term residence	1181	545	8,082	2,066	12,849	3,015	15,439	3,391	18,432	3,864	21,346	4,413
Total permits of long duration	100,363	44,640	121,357	60,783	134,818	70,481	138413	71,717	120,342	67,754	142,955	75,624
Total stay permits for TCN	292,460	262,292	288,837	261,824	298,800	273,569	303,289	276,447	276,726	248,793	284,577	255,683

Source: Ministry of Migration Policy database

Note: M (male) and F (female). * Second-generation permits.

Converting the national long term permits to EU long term resident permits has aimed to further promote the integration of the people concerned as this type of permits provides for increased rights and equal treatment with nationals in important areas of social and economic life (Article 97 No.4251 / 2014) offering advantages not granted to national long-term regimes of 10 years or indefinite duration. Professedly, the only advantage of national long-term permits is the validity period. However, the EU long-term resident status is a permanent status. If, for example, it is not revoked or lost for specific reasons, the person concerned does not have to prove every five years that he or she is entitled to it. The residence permit is

³According to the Ministry of the Migration Policy, the long-term permits do not just suggest a long-term status (five years or longer) to their holders, they also provide them with certain rights. Therefore, duration and rights are the two characteristics that define the long-term permits. In this sense other types of residence permits could also be included to this category, such as residence card (*deltio diamonis*) issued to a member of Greek or EU citizen's family, or permanent residence (*deltio monimis diamonis*) issued to a member of Greek or EU citizen's family.

renewed every 5 years, but the status granted does not cease to apply as a result of expiry of the residence permit.

In August 2018, the total number of residence permits reached 520,260, of which 218,579 were of long duration. The ratio of long-term permits to total residence permits has increased significantly, with long-term permits accounting for 40.45% of all valid permits in August 2018 compared to 26% in 2013, 33% in 2014, 36% in 2015, 37% in 2016 and 35.8% in 2017. Ten-year and second generation permits account for the largest share of long-term permits, with a greater number of long-term permits being issued to men than to women.

In the category of all types of family migration, the available data of the Ministry of Migration Policy for 2018 show an increase of 1.8% (4,264 out of 233,854) comparing to 2017 (229,590). Indeed, over 50% of total resident permits (274,537) issued till August 2018 are under the category of “other”, where apart from long-term permits and family members of Greek and EU citizens, there are included permits on exceptional or humanitarian grounds. Stay permits on exceptional grounds are awarded to TCNs who reside in Greece and can prove that they have developed strong ties to the country, the duration of these permits (on exceptional grounds) is of one year and after that period, the permit may only be renewed for one of the remaining purposes foreseen in the Greek Migration Code (work, study, family, etc). The submission of an application for a stay permit on exceptional grounds does not imply a legal stay of the applicant while the application is in process (Law 4251/2017, Article 19). Meanwhile, stay permits on humanitarian grounds may be awarded to TCNs who reside in Greece falling into specific categories such as victims of human trafficking, rejected asylum seekers or persons suffering from serious health problems. On August 31st 2018, there were 1,398 valid stay permits on humanitarian grounds. Another category of stay permits for international students shows also upward trends from 550 stay permits in 2017 to 732 till August 2018.

The Immigration and Social Integration Code contains provisions that facilitate the stay of third-country nationals whose investments are characterized as strategic investments, via the provision of extended stay time limits for the representatives of investment bodies and their partners. Moreover it provides the possibility of granting residence permits to third country nationals and their family members, who proceed to the purchase of real estate property in Greece, the value of which exceeds 250,000 Euro (MFA 2013). The permits are renewable every five years provided the TCN still owns the relevant property or other investment.

Since it was launched in 2013 the investor permit scheme has attracted approximately 500 investors per year and by the 31st of August 2018, 184 beneficiaries held this type of permits, a clear upward trend comparing to 2,280 stay permits issued in 2017. As for their nationalities, their majority came from China, with 1,512 beneficiaries, followed by Russia (462) and Turkey (334). With regards to gender, men hold 60% of stay permits for investment purposes.

As noted by real estate agents, the increased demand for luxury holiday homes that far exceeds the minimum limit of EUR 250,000 and is generally sold for amounts in the range of EUR 1-2 million has offered a great boost to this type of permits. According to real estate agencies and lawyers operating in this market, obtaining the five year stay permit has been an additional benefit from making such investments rather than the primary objective of the investors (Kathimerini newspaper, 11/10/2017).

Indicative of stabilisation migrant’s status in Greece would be considered the decrease in number of leaves for exceptional reasons which is largely used in order to regularize the semi-irregular status of those lapsing back into irregularity because of economic crisis or

other vulnerable cases. Thus, from 24,681 exceptional leaves issued in 2017, their number is reduced by 3,027 (out of 21,654) in 2018. Indeed, a recently issued Ministerial Decision (18951/27-2-2018- Gazette 2847/B) defines the documents for regularization of three TCNs categories: for exceptional circumstances; the TCN'S parent-child relationship with a national minor and TCNs previously holding a stay permit (expired) issued by the Hellenic Police Authorities.

4. Labour Market Participation of Immigrants at Times of Crisis

Migrant Employment Status

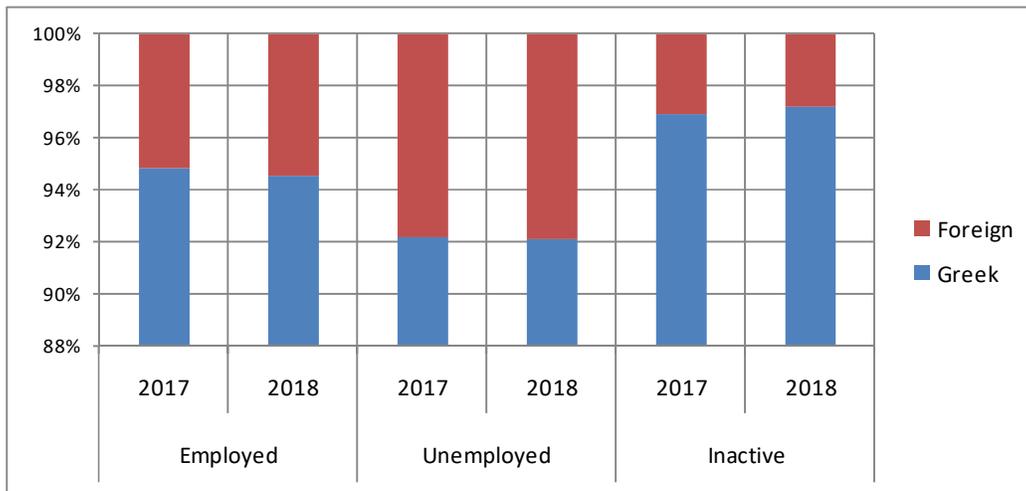
The year 2013 marks an important change in the distribution of migrant workers among the three sectors (primary, secondary and tertiary). The percentage of migrants working in the primary sector doubled in 2013 from 5.4% in 2008 to 13.5% in 2013. Migrant employment in the secondary sector fell sharply, from 49.6% in 2008 to 29.1% in 2013, reflecting the overall decline of activity in that sector. Finally, in the tertiary sector, migrant employment rose from 45% in 2008 to 57.3% in 2013. It is highly likely that these changes reflect the crisis of the construction sector and the necessity for many migrants to declare themselves as employed in the agricultural sector or indeed to turn for employment to that sector, in order to renew their permits. In addition several migrants have of course sought employment or registered their previously informal employment in the service sector when their secondary sector activity has stopped.

In absolute numbers, the primary sector created 15,500 new jobs for migrants in the first quarter of 2013, while during the same quarter 90,600 and 6,400 jobs were lost in the secondary and tertiary sectors. In 2013, the number of migrants employed in construction was just 43,000 when the equivalent number for 2008 had been 114,700 (Zografakis 2014).

This trend is confirmed in recent years as migrants are mainly occupied in the tertiary sector, with a large representation of Albanians, in all three sectors for both years.

According to the EL.STAT, the share of foreign citizens' labour force in total population in 2nd quarter of 2018 is 69.5%, showing a slight increase comparing to 2017 (66.7%). Interestingly, their participation is significantly higher than of Greek citizens (51.1% in 2017 and 51.3% in 2018) by more than 18.2% (figures 5 and 6).

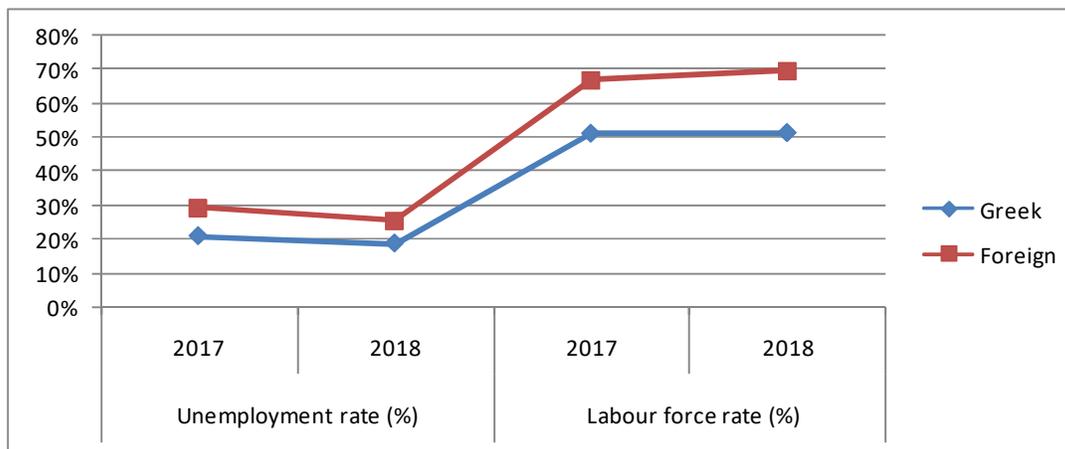
Figure 5: Labour market status by citizenship, 2017 and 2nd quarter 2018



Source: Graph compiled by authors based on Hellenic Statistical Authority (EL.STAT.), Labour Force Survey, 2017 and 2nd Quarter 2018.

At the same time, the unemployment rate of Greek citizens in 2017 was by 8% and 6% lower than that of foreigner, whose unemployment rates stood at 29% and 25% in 2017 and 2018, respectively (figure 6).

Figure 6: Rate of participation in labour market (%), 2017 and 2nd quarter 2018



Source: Graph compiled by authors based on Hellenic Statistical Authority (EL.STAT.), Labour Force Survey, 2017 and 2nd Quarter 2018

Indeed, unemployment rates for Greece’s general population show a steady decrease over the past two years. The same trend is followed by male TCNs yet for their female counterparts the highest unemployment rates were observed in 2016, while interestingly enough for EU28 countries’ citizens, regardless of gender, unemployment rates were lower in 2015 than in 2016, 2017 and 2018. In terms of gender, in the same category, the numbers of both

employed and unemployed females are significantly higher than that of men in 2017 and 2018, respectively (table 5).

Table 5: The situation of EU28 countries' citizens in Greek labour market by gender, 2017-2018

	2017		2018 (Q2)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
EU28 countries' citizens (in thousands) (over 15 years)	27.2	47.4	25.9	48.1
Employed	14.7	19.2	17.5	20.4
Unemployed	4.3	7.9	4.1	7.1

Source: EUROSTAT LFS Database, 2018 (Q2)

One wonders whether this is a statistical shortcoming of the LFS data related to the area of employment of EU nationals or to the fact that EU nationals can work also without a contract as they do not need to prove employment to renew their stay permits. In other words, one wonders whether EU citizens fall into the same economic crisis trap like Greek natives – being offered informal, uninsured, temporary work and hence officially appearing as unemployed, while at the same time being still foreigners they are discriminated against compared to Greeks and hence do not benefit from the overall improvement of the labour market.

Interestingly, when it comes to the category of Non-EU28 citizens, the above gender balance is reversed, with the numbers of employed and unemployed females is much lower than that of men (table 6). It could be explained by the fact that a large part of TCNs women in Greece provide undeclared care services and their status is regulated for “family reunification” purposes. It is not a coincidence that 63% of TCNs holders of stay permit for “family reunification” in 2018 are women (129,206 out of 204,841).

Table 6: The situation of Non-EU28 citizens in the Greek labour market

	2017		2018 (Q2)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Non-EU28 countries' citizens (in thousands) (over 15 years)	158.8	170.1	157.5	165.5
Employed	98.3	59.9	106.9	64.1
Unemployed	31.0	34.9	24.2	35.7

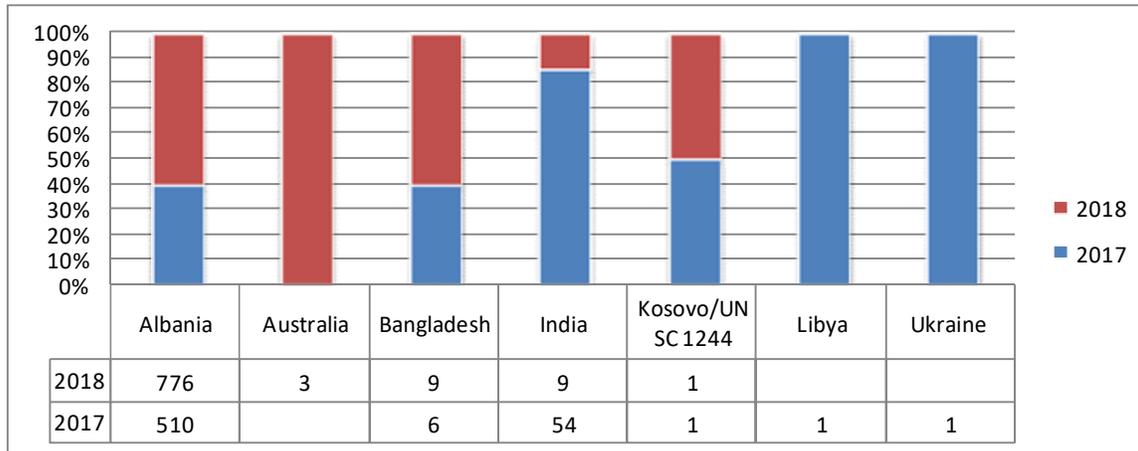
Source: EUROSTAT LFS Database, 2018 (Q2)

At the same time, the flow data on seasonal work show an upward trend in 2018 comparing to 2017. According to the data provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on B1- visa category for seasonal work issued by Greek consulates abroad, the number of TCNs seasonal workers has been increased from 573 in 2017 to 798 in September 2018 (figure 7).

In an attempt to control temporary and seasonal work in labour market, a Ministerial Decision (1134/14-3-2017, Gazette 867/B) was issued in March 2017 with regard to the

procedure of laying down the admission volumes of third-country nationals and the invitation procedure for seasonal work.

Figure 7: B1- Visa category for seasonal workers by nationality, 2017 -September 2018



Source: Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs, data provide upon authors' request.

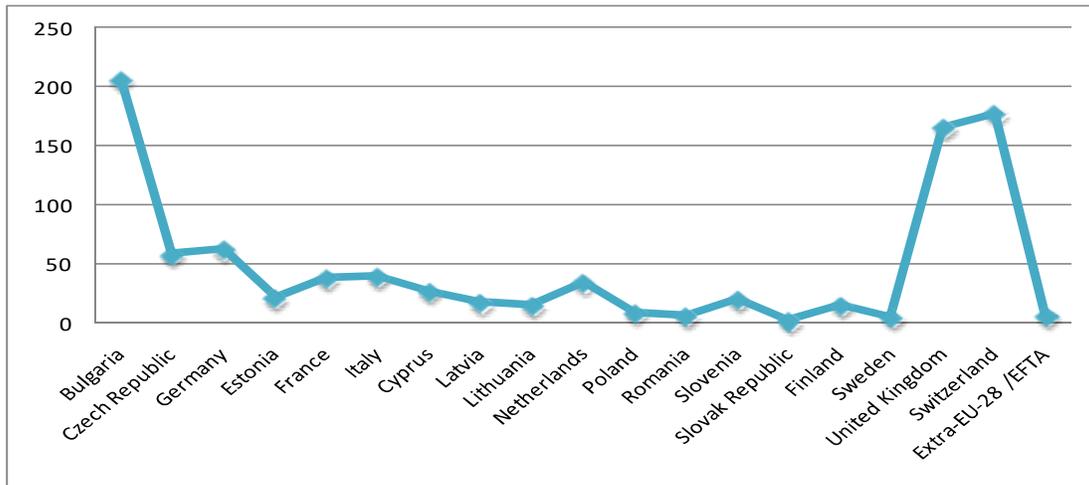
With regard to other types of temporary work, the flow data on TCNs workers entering Greece for this purpose show again increasing trends from 49,603 in 2017 to 59,207 in August 2018⁴. The admission volumes and the invitation procedure for temporary employment, seasonal work and employment of fish workers have been further regulated by the Ministerial Decision: 1134 issued in March 2017 and an additional Joint Ministerial Decision: (4872/105/2017) that fixed the maximum number of residence permits (quota) for third country nationals for the years 2017 and 2018.

Another significant category is that of EU/EEA posted workers in Greece. According to the data provided by the Hellenic Ministry of Labour, Social Insurance and Social Solidarity⁵, the number of EU/EFTA and Extra-EU-28/EFTA posted workers has been subsequently increased from 622 in 2015 to 979 and 916 in 2016 and 2017, respectively (figures 8 and 9).

⁴2017: Sub-categories: stay permit for work 14; workers for special reasons 1.746; workers 47.843/ 2018: Sub-categories: stay permit for work 12; workers for special reasons 1.763;

⁵ No official data available online/Data provided by Hellenic Ministry of Labour, Social Insurance and Social Solidarity upon authors' request

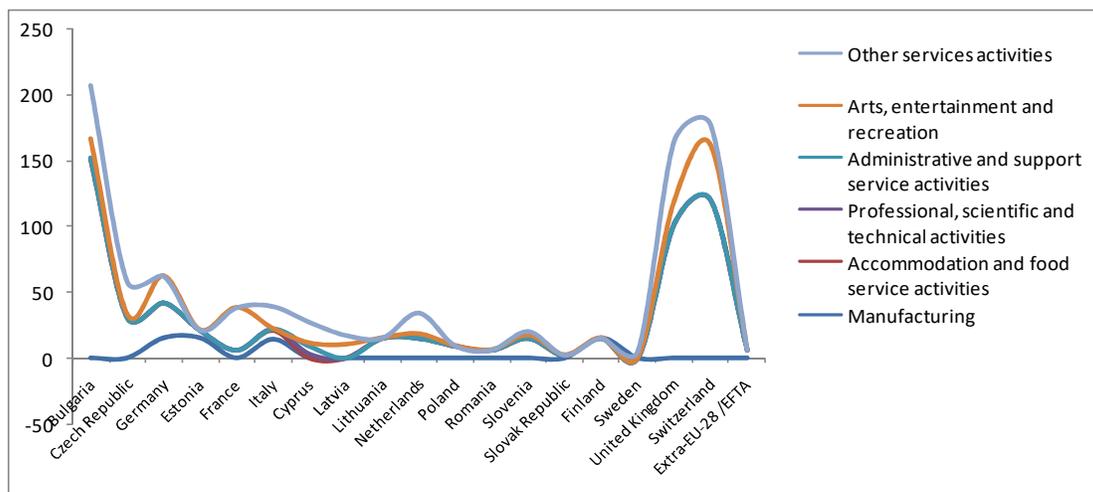
Figure 8: EU/EFTA and Extra-EU-28/EFTA posted workers in Greece in 2017



Source: Hellenic Ministry of Labour, Social Insurance and Social Solidarity, data provide upon authors' request.

Nearly 60% of posted workers in Greece are citizens of Bulgaria (206), Switzerland (177) and United Kingdom (165), while in the category Extra EU-28/EFTA are included six posted workers from Serbia. With regard to the sectors of employment, 56.2% of the total posted workers are employed in “accommodation and food service activities”, followed by the category of “arts, entertainment and recreation” (figure 9). Overall the numbers of posted workers remain extremely low.

Figure 9: EU/EFTA and Extra EU-28/EFTA posted workers in Greece by nationality and sector in 2017



Source: Hellenic Ministry of Labour, Social Insurance and Social Solidarity, data provide upon authors' request.

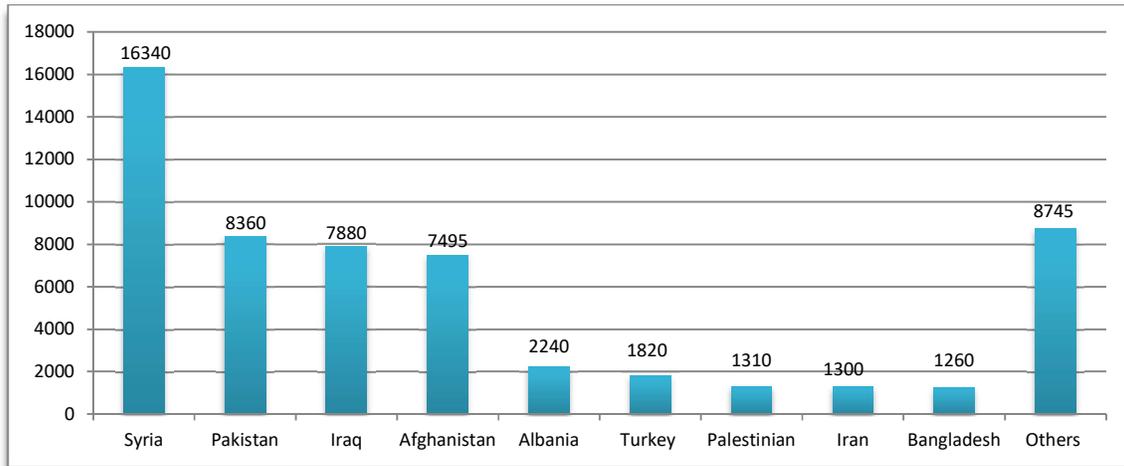
5. Irregular Migration Flows and Readmissions

Greece has been characterised by relatively high irregular migrant population stocks and flows during the past 28 years. Throughout these years, there have been shifts vis à vis the border areas that constitute the principal entry points for the inflows of irregular migrants (table 7).

Different geopolitical evolutions led more than one million people to cross the Mediterranean and Aegean seas since January 2015. The total number of arrivals in Greece from Turkey was 847,084 during the entire 2015. Flows continued at a high rate during the first two months of 2016, with 147,000 people arriving but total flows for 2016 stood only at 173,561 showing the dramatic decrease of the flows after the implementation of the EU Turkey statement.

According to UNHCR (2017) data, 56,750 new arrivals were recorded in 2017 in Greece (figure 10). The most common nationalities were Syria, Pakistan, Iraq, Afghanistan and Albania.

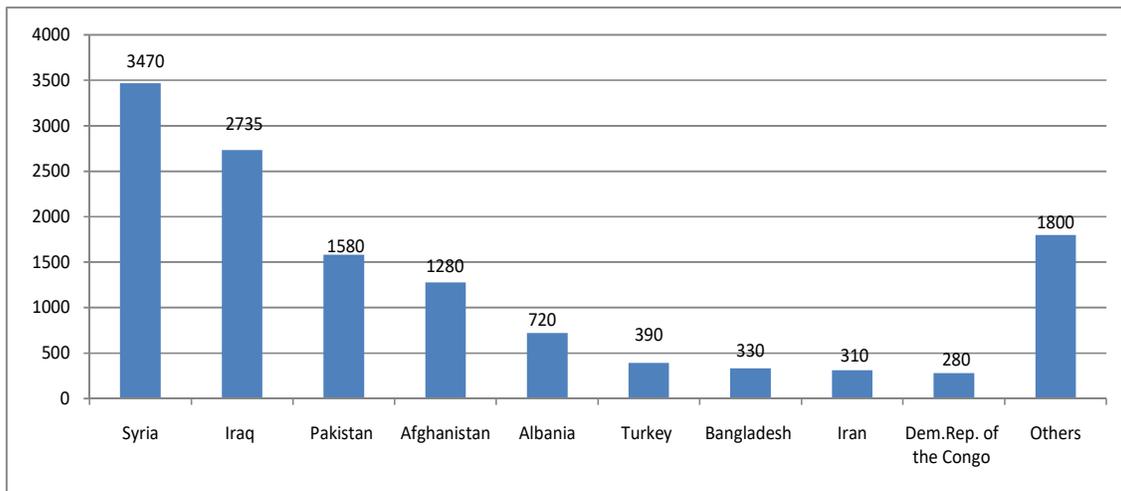
Figure 10: Arrivals of foreign population by nationality in 2017



Source: UNHCR Population Statistics Reference Database, 2017

Meanwhile, according to the same source, the number of new arrivals recording in the first quarter of 2018 was 12,895 people (figure 11). Among ten top nationalities are again Syria, Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Albania.

Figure 11: Arrivals of foreign population by nationality in first quarter of 2018



Source: UNHCR Population Statistics Reference Database, 2018

Regarding irregular entry at the land border of Greece and Turkey, the number of recorded arrivals in 2017 was 5,677 persons – representing an approximately 50% increase compared to 2016 (Petraou et. al. 2018, p. 13; UNHCR 2018).

Arrivals from the Greek Turkish land and sea border however have picked up again in 2018. Between 1-31 August 2018 alone, Greek authorities registered 4,339 migrants and refugees who arrived in Greece by land and sea. Two thirds of all individuals arrived by sea (out of a total 3,223), while the remaining 1,116 entered Greece from Turkey mainly through the land border situated at Evros river region (IOM - DTM 2018, p. 18). A significant increase in land arrivals has been observed in the second quarter of 2018 which is the highest number since 2015.

Indeed, the 31,451 arrivals reported between January and August 2018 represent 79% increase compared to the 17,534 reported in the same period last year, and 10% less than the 35,052 reported in the whole of 2017. An estimated 74% of migrants and refugees arrived in Greece by sea, and the remaining 26% were registered as land arrivals (a total of 12,166). This is the highest number of land arrivals been observed since 2015 (DTM 2018, p.18). Syrians are the most numerous nationality group, representing 31% of all registered newcomers arriving by sea to Greece, followed by Iraqi (21%) and Afghanistan (19%).

Data provided by the Greek police by border area and nationality (tables 7 and 8) provide a detailed and comprehensive view of the total arrivals of irregular migrants or asylum seekers in the country between 2016 and 2018 (first six months). The majority of apprehensions have been recorded the Greek-Albanian border. However, this should be taken with some caution, as the reported apprehensions at Greek-Albanian borders might not be directly referred to apprehended irregular Albania citizens. Recently, Albania has found itself coping with a rising influx of migrants, which according to media has emerged as a significant segment of the "new Balkan route" through which asylum seekers choose to reach the EU countries. Sources from the Albanian Ministry of Interior refer to daily border-crossings of asylum seekers mainly from Syria who enters the green border zone between Greece and Albania, heading towards other EU countries across Albania-Montenegro-Bosnia and Herzegovina.

During January - May 2018, a total of 2,133 irregular immigrants were caught by police while entering Albanian territory via Greek borders (Koha Jone Newspaper, 11/06/2018)⁶.

Table 7: Apprehensions of irregular migrants, per border, 2016-2018

Border\Year	2016	2017	2018*
Greek-Albanian Border	5,915	3,546	2,916
Greek-FYROM Border	783	437	737
Greek-Bulgarian Border	1,421	679	1,983
Greek-Turkish land Border	3,784	1,611	8,407
Lesbos	98,960	2,805	7,134
Samos	15,211	1,661	2,982
Chios	41,103	3,113	1,630
A'Dod/Nisos	4,853	1,023	503
B'Dod/Nisos	15,201	652	1,526
Cyclades	533	264	623
Crete	1,700	959	1,136
Rest of the country	15,356	8,219	12,754
Total	204,820	24,984	42,416

Source: Greek Police Database (2018)

Note: data refer to apprehensions, not people. Hence the same person if apprehended twice counts twice. * Data for 2018 refer to the first 6 months.

According to statistics provided by Greek Police Authority, the islands of Lesbos, Samos, Rhodes, Chios and Megisti are the main entry points for those migrants and refugees that arrived in Greece by sea, while the Evros River (situated on the North-Westland border between Greece and Turkey) is the main entry point of those who arrived by land (IOM - DTM 2018, p. 19).

Table 8: Apprehensions of irregular migrants in Greece (at the borders and within the country, 5 main nationality groups), 2013-2018

2013		2014		2015		2016		2017		2018*	
Albania	15,389	Syria	32,520	Syria	499,495	Syria	86,058	Albania	6,761	Syria	10,194
Syria	8,517	Albania	16,751	Afghanistan	213,267	Afghanistan	44,260	Pakistan	2,745	Iraq	6,262
Afghanistan	6,412	Afghanistan	12,901	Pakistan	27,261	Iraq	28,476	Algeria	878	Albania	5,767
Pakistan	3,982	Pakistan	6,184	Albania	16,910	Pakistan	13,460	Iraq	828	Pakistan	4,967
Bangladesh	1,524	Somalia	3,621	Iraq	91,769	Albania	11,333	Georgia	643	Afghanistan	3,975

Source: Greek Police Database (2018)

Note: data refer to apprehensions, not people. Hence the same person if apprehended twice counts twice. * Data for 2018 refer to the first 6 months.

⁶These trends and figures were corroborated by the Albanian Deputy Interior Minister in an interview for media.

Despite the decrease of apprehensions of irregular migrants at Greek-Albanian borders in relation to 2016 and 2017, still Albanians remain by far the largest group in terms of apprehensions at land borders in the first half of 2018. While Pakistanis and Afghans were among the most common returned nationalities in 2015-2016, in 2017 and 2018 Iraqis, Algerians as well as Georgians and Afghans emerged among the largest nationality groups for returns and readmissions.

Table 9: Returns of irregular migrants from Greece (5 main nationality groups),

2014		2015		2016		2017		2018*	
Albania	9,677	Albania	9,628	Albania	6,763	Albania	6,761	Albania	2,632
Pakistan	3,563	Pakistan	1,543	Pakistan	1,624	Pakistan	2,745	Pakistan	822
Georgia	1,202	Georgia	810	Morocco	1,491	Algeria	878	Iraq	786
Bangladesh	1,012	Bulgaria	317	Iraq	1,075	Iraq	828	Georgia	281
Afghanistan	612	Syria**	310	Afghanistan	1,058	Georgia	643	Algeria	190

Source: Greek Police Database (2018)

Note: * Data for 2018 refer to the first 6 months.

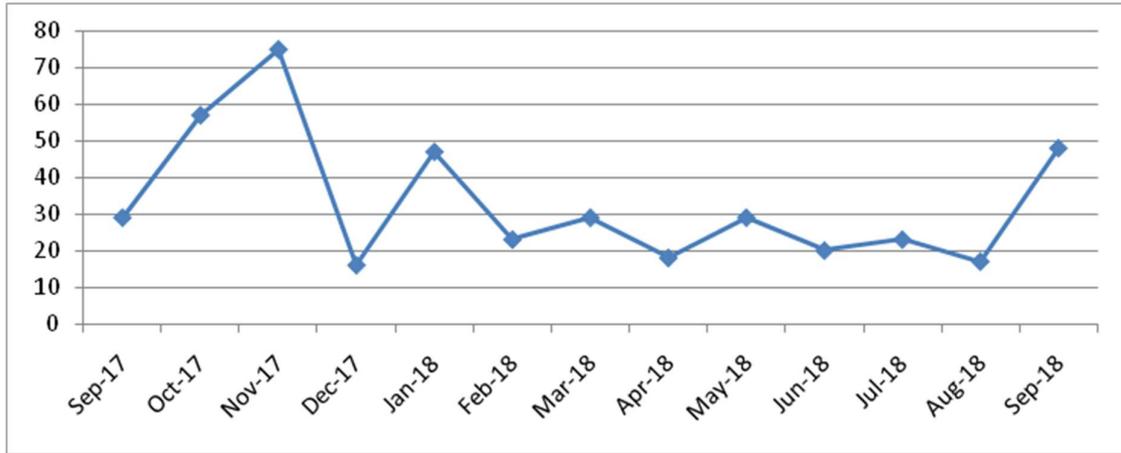
According to the Ministry of Migration Policy, nearly 2,335 assisted voluntary returns through IOM World Map (2018), and 4,778 forced returns have taken place in the period January – June 2018, while in 2017 the numbers of returnees reached 19,096. A total number of 44,483 migrants have been returned from Greece to their country of origin via the IOM’s ‘Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Program’, while from June 2016 till 12 October 2018 alone, their number reached 12,889 (IOM World Map 2018).

Persisting thorny issues are the cases of alleged push backs at the Greek-Turkish border which are mainly taking place at Evros land borders with Turkey. In February 2018, a report issued by the Greek Council for Refugees (GCR 2018) reported a systematic push backs cases in the Evros region throughout 2017. According to GCR, the allegations of push backs have been consistent and increasing in numbers, referring *inter alia* to large families, pregnant women, victims of torture, children and other persons belonging to vulnerable groups. According to Solidarity Now (Newsletter August 2018) illegal push backs allegedly made by Greek officials, who are said to destroy migrants’ mobile phones and documents, while upon return to Turkey, they are usually captured by the Turkish army. According to the same report “*families are transferred to the city of Urfa in northern Syria where they are held for 40 days, while men are transferred to the city of Afrin in Syria and are handed over to the jabhat al nusra forces, controlled by Turkey*” (Solidarity Now Newsletter August 2018).

At the same time, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights (2017) and UNHCR (2017) has expressed deep concerns about reported practices of collective expulsions from Greece. At the same time, an *ex officio* investigation was launched by the Greek Ombudsman in June 2017.

With regard to returns under the EU-Turkey Agreement, based on the press releases of the Greek Ministry of Citizen Protection (21/09/2018), the procedure on the islands was completed in 25,814 cases over 2017 (figure 12). Of these, 5,437 resulted in a rejection of the asylum claim, and 20,377 cases resulted in the lifting of the geographical restriction and the further transfers to the mainland.

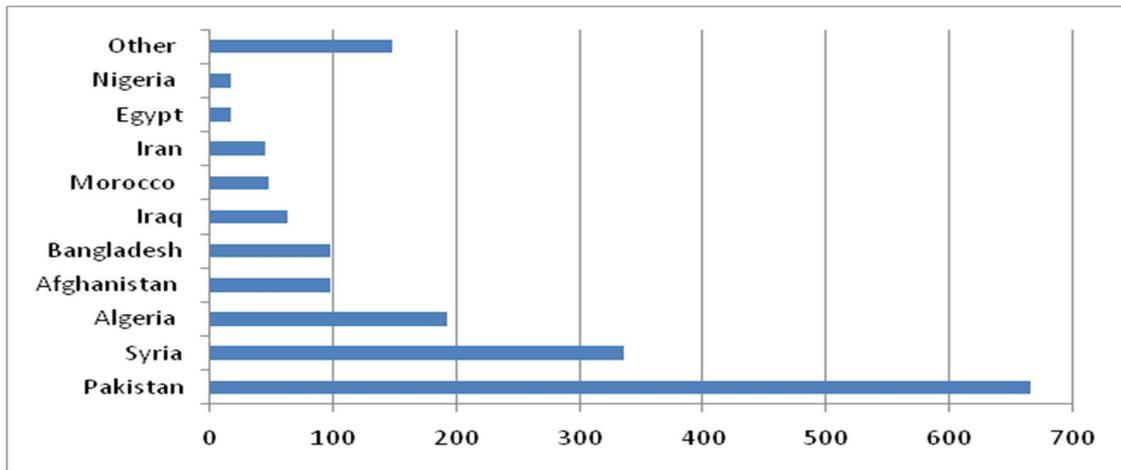
Figure 12: Return trends from Greece to Turkey in the framework of the EU-Turkey Agreement, September 2017- September 2018



Source: Press Releases, Greek Ministry of Citizen Protection (21/09/2018),

In addition, 1,690 people were returned from Greece to Turkey from April 2016 to 31 August 2018 on the basis of the EU-Turkey Agreement⁷. The majority of those returned to Turkey are Pakistani nationals (39%), followed by Syrians (18%), Algerians (11%), Bangladeshis (6%) and Afghans (6%) (figure 13). Of those returned, 91% are men, 4% women and 5% children. Meanwhile, 33 Syrians (out of 309) have been returned because their asylum applications were found inadmissible at 2nd instance, while the remaining did not apply for asylum or withdrew their asylum claims in Greece.

Figure 13: Returns to Turkey from Greece by nationality, September 2017 - September 2018



Source: Press Releases, Greek Ministry of Citizen Protection (04/10/2018)

⁷<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/65485>

The European Commission (2017) in a relevant press release on the progress of EU-Turkey Statement has argued that the pace of returns from Greece to Turkey is too slow, suggesting that “*significant additional efforts are still needed to reduce the backlog of asylum applications, address the insufficient pre-return processing and detention capacity in Greece to improve returns*” (2017, p.2).

Indeed, in the context of the EU-Turkey agreement, the Greek Asylum Service has applied a fast-track border procedure (Law 4375/2016 (Article 60(4))), according to which, if there are a large number of arrivals of third-country nationals or stateless persons who arrived in Greece after 20 March 2016 and apply for international protection, then a special, exceptional fast-track procedure will be activated, while Dublin family cases and vulnerable cases were left out of this process.

This procedure has been actually implemented in the Reception and Identification Centres on the islands of Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Leros and Kos. In this procedure, the Asylum Services assisted by staff and interpreters from EASO, as well as by the Hellenic Police, while the entire procedure at first and second instance has to be completed within 14 days. Following EU pressure on Greece “*to respond to an overwhelming majority of decisions rebutting the presumption that Turkey is a ‘safe third country’ or ‘first country of asylum’ for asylum seekers*” (AIDA 2016, p. 14), the composition of the Appeals Committees which is responsible for examining appeals against asylum decisions made by the Asylum Service was indeed modified (by Law 4399/2016) in a manner that facilitated the returns to Turkey (Bagavos et.al 2018, p. 254). On the other hand, the fast-track procedure has predominantly taken the form of an admissibility procedure to examine whether applications may be dismissed (AIDA 2016), which result in asylum seekers being practically excluded from relocation.

These developments (Law 4399/2016) resulted in a clear division between reception and asylum procedures for those entering the country before and after 20 March 2016. Under these circumstances, the Greek asylum system faced a double challenge: first, to transfer people in mainland Greece so as to enable them to access the asylum process; and secondly, to rapidly evaluate the asylum applications of those arrived after 20 March 2016 and were being held in the hotspots for readmission to Turkey (The Greek Ombudsman 2017).

In contrast to first challenge (which was handled in a quite satisfactory way), the fast-track border procedure has not operated adequately (Bagavos et. al 2018, p. 254). One of the reasons for this was the limited number of national and EASO staff, which was insufficient to handle the number of lodged applications (AIDA 2016; The Greek Ombudsman 2017). Of course, another persistent reason is the lack of coordination and insufficient distribution of competencies between public agencies, services, international organizations, NGOs and local authorities (Koulocheris 2017). What’s more, due to the priority list of nationality for the lodging and evaluation of the asylum applications, the asylum procedure has been severely delayed for non-prioritized nationalities as in the case that fall under the fast-track procedures. This, in turn, led to the hotspots being overcrowded and reception conditions deteriorated in terms of sanitation and hygiene, while the access to health care was limited, in particular for vulnerable groups (ECRE et al. 2016; NCHR 2017).

Driven by the need to better implement the EU-Turkey statement, a set of asylum reforms took place in 2017. Among them are provisions on the implementation of the EU-Turkey agreement introduced by L 4375/2016 in April 2016 which have been amended in June 2016 and subsequently in March 2017 and August 2017 (GCR 2018). At the same time, a new law (4540/2018) was passed in Greece, which transposed the recast Reception Conditions Directive (Directive 2013/33/EU). The above law’s amendments also extended the

applicability of fast-track asylum procedures on the Aegean islands until the end of 2018. Furthermore, it revises in detail the geographical restrictions on the free movement of asylum applicants residing on the islands and establishes the legal basis for EASO's participation in asylum procedures.

6. Recent Developments in Greek Migration and Asylum Policy

In 2016, evolutions occurring at Greece's different borders challenged the country's migration and asylum policy more than ever before, to the point of endangering also Greece's inclusion in the Schengen passport-free movement zone. Although Greece accounted for the majority of arrivals in 2015, only 1.5% of those transiting claimed asylum in the country as other European countries were their target destinations (Eurostat newsrelease, 04/03/2016). However, this has changed as moving on is no longer an option; thus since 2016 there has been a stark increase in asylum applications lodged in Greece (see relevant section above). The main challenge thus for both government and society in 2018 has been to relocate or integrate those in the mainland while also processing those in the islands with the aim of returning them under the fast track asylum procedure. In addition the question of new arrivals and where to accommodate them has come back with significant urgency as provisional camps in northern Greece were reopened to accommodate for irregular migrants and asylums seekers arriving through the Greek Turkish land border.

Being under mounting pressure because of the humanitarian crisis taking place at the Reception and Identification Centre in Moria, the Ministry of Migration Policy's is planning to transfer about 2,000 people (largely those considered "vulnerable") during the next period. In this context, approximately 2,500 accommodation places are expected to be created in the municipalities of Volvi, Styrida and Grevena. Also 1,500 places are expected to be created by increasing the capacity of existing camps and by renting apartments (Solidarity Now newsletter, September 2018).

6.1 Institutional Developments

Both the normalisation of the migration situation in Greece and the need for long term structural efforts and coordination at national level seem to have brought to the creation of the Ministry of Migration Policy which was established in November 2016 (Presidential Decree 123/2016), and is divided into three main branches:

- a. The General Secretariat for Migration Policy of the former Ministry of Interior and Administration Reconstruction, except for the Directorate of Citizenship that remains at the Ministry of the Interior;
- b. the General Secretariat of Reception of the former Ministry of Interior and Administrative Reconstruction;
- c. the independent Asylum Service and the independent "Appeals Authority".

6.2 Developments in Asylum Policy

The shutting down of the Balkan route combined with the EU-Turkey Agreement forced the Greek government to hastily adopt a new law (L 4375/2016) on 3 April 2016 to amend the procedures for processing asylum claims. The law mainly establishes what was agreed in the EU-Turkey Statement, introducing an exceptional regime applicable at the country's borders. It also introduces several reforms in the asylum process and international protection, the border regime, first reception, and, finally, labour rights of beneficiaries of international protection. The introduction of an exceptional border regime is a nodal point in the law's amendment and will be discussed further below.

Modifications to the appeals procedure were made in amendments to the law introduced and passed shortly after the new law has come into force. The Greek Parliament initially rejected these modifications deriving from the European Commission on the grounds that they had been submitted too late in the procedure. The amendments were subsequently introduced under a different bill and thus passed as an amendment to a different law⁸.

This legislative procedure has been highly criticized by experts, including members of the government, as it provides for the restructuring of the Appeals Committees with a view to reducing the possibility for appellants to request a hearing⁹. Concerns were also raised with regard to the constitutionality of the Appeals Committees' composition, as it included two judges, yet, the Council of State dismissed the objection of unconstitutionality submitted by the Greek Council for Refugees and the Group of Lawyers for the Rights of Refugees and Immigrants (EFSYN Newspaper, 09/05/2017). At the same time, the Law has established an exceptional border procedure, and enabled EASO officials to participate actively during the interviews of the applicants¹⁰.

A notable development in Greece has been the establishment of a special border regime for asylum processing as per Article 60(4) of Law 4375/2016, which is in contradiction with other provisions on the asylum procedure. More specifically, the ministries of Interior and Defence may activate exceptional measures in the event of large numbers of arrivals lodging asylum applications at the border.

These exceptional measures include:

- The possibility for police authorities and unarmed soldiers to conduct the registration of asylum applications.
- The possibility for European Asylum Support Office (EASO) officials and interpreters to assist the Greek authorities in registration and the conduct of interviews.
- An expedient version of the border procedure which lasts no more than 14 days at first and second instance. This entails a one-day deadline for asylum seekers to prepare for the interview and a maximum three-day deadline for lodging an appeal¹¹.

⁸Draft Law "Legal framework for the establishment of regimes for Strengthening Private Investments for the regional and economic development of the country – Establishment of Development Council and other provisions," 2 June 2016. For a more detailed discussion on that see (AIRE ECRE Report 2016).

⁹ It introduces a restructuring of the Appeals Committees to comprise of two judges of administrative courts and a member designated by UNHCR instead of three members selected by a Selection Committee (AIRE ECRE Report 2016).

¹⁰ That way the law provides for the clarification of EASO's role, as under the previous framework the EASO was in principle limited to assisting the Asylum Service. The role of EASO has been criticised as non-transparent. For more on that see AIRE ECRE Report 2016.

¹¹The exceptional border procedure cannot be applied to vulnerable asylum seekers and to persons falling within the family provisions of the Dublin III Regulation (AIRE ECRE Report 2016)

As a result, the majority of those arriving to Greece by sea after the EU-Turkey Agreement are obliged to remain in the islands while their asylum applications are being processed, leading to a situation of overcrowded facilities and complaints by local societies (Kathimerini newspaper, 02/04/2017 & 19/09/2017).

In addition, the “safe third country” (Article 56(1) L 4375/2016) concept is considered as ground for inadmissibility – the admissibility test is a sort of pre-asylum test which is applied solely in the context of the Fast-Track Border Procedure (Article 60(4) L 4375/2016) on the islands for those arrived after 20 March 2016 and subject to the EU-Turkey statement (GCR 2018). As a result, the asylum applications of the majority of Syrians arriving in Greece after the release of the EU-Turkey statement are found inadmissible on the first instance. The newly established Appeals Committees generally upheld the inadmissibility decisions; yet, two Syrians challenged these second instance decisions before the Council of State, leading to a de facto suspension of second instance decision pending the outcome.

In a recent turn (on 28 September 2017), the Council of State rejected the final appeals of the two Syrian asylum seekers mentioned above (who were supported legally by the NGO Greek Council for Refugees) declaring their asylum claims inadmissible (Amnesty International 2017).

In April 20, 2018, Greek government was accused of overturning a binding court ruling ordering it to end its abusive policy of trapping asylum seekers on Greece’s islands. The case was made public by 21 human rights and humanitarian organizations (HRW 2018), which supported that the Greek government instead of carrying out the April 17 ruling by the Council of State, it issued an administrative decision reinstating the policy, known as the “containment policy.” In more detail, the Council of State’s (April 17) ruling said that Greece’s containment policy had no legal basis and that there were no imperative reasons under EU and Greek law justifying the restrictions to the freedom of movement of asylum seekers. It ordered the annulment of the administrative decision imposing the restrictions and permitted the free movement of asylum seekers arriving on the islands following the ruling’s publication. The ruling also highlighted that the disproportionate distribution of asylum seekers has overburdened the islands. However, on 20 April 2018, the newly appointed Asylum Service Director quickly reinstated the annulled Decision (GCR Press release, 23/04/2018). The case was brought before the Council of State by the Greek Council for Refugees, a non-governmental organization providing legal support to asylum seekers. Yet, non-governmental groups began a campaign to #OpenTheIslands in December 2017, calling on Greece and its EU partners to transfer asylum seekers to the mainland before winter and end the containment policy.

Conditions of Asylum Seekers on the Islands

The Greek islands have been the place of stay and waiting for many months, and in some cases over one year - for all asylum seekers arriving through Turkey after the EU-Turkey Joint Declaration in March 2016. A notable preliminary finding of a recent study (Jauhainen 2017) conducted in asylum seeker reception sites on the island of Lesbos, Greece, is the different conditions between the island’s reception sites, Moria, Kara Tepe, and PIKPA, functioning under different management, state authorities, local authorities and volunteers respectively.

Based on a survey conducted with over 500 asylum seekers in December 2016, respondents felt safest in PIKPA and least safe in Moria, more of them felt they were treated well in Kara Tepe, and PIKPA than in Moria and the same pattern remained with regards to access to

facilities such as toilets and showers. The authors pointed out that facilities of the sites should be improved immediately to make the everyday lives of asylum seekers more decent. Yet, conditions continue to deteriorate, given the continuous arrivals adding to the thousands who are “trapped” in the hotspots coupled with the non-implementation of returns to Turkey by the Greek authorities. The situation has also been exacerbated by the fact that NGOs and international organisations that have provided auxiliary services such as health services, primary assistance and legal advice have left and the Greek state has taken over all functions.

The gradual withdrawal of UNHCR and NGOs from the islands was the result of the non-renewal of their funding programs at the request of the Greek authorities (Kathimerini newspaper, 30/10/2017). In fact, a number of NGOs, with a joint statement (Solidarity Now statement, July 2017), pointed out the possible shortcomings that could derive from the NGOs withdrawal from operations in the Greek islands while a recent joint letter of 19 organizations to the Prime Minister on the situation of asylum seekers in the Aegean islands (HLHR 2017) urges the Greek authorities to end to the continuing "restraining policy".

In Moria camp alone, 9,000 people live in a space designed for 3,100, where degraded conditions and an inscrutable asylum process have led to what aid groups describe as a mental health crisis (The New York Times, 02/10/2018). The majority of the camp's residents are Syrian, Iraqi and Afghan refugees, many of whom have suffered wartime traumas have been exacerbated by the overcrowded and filthy conditions, which in turn have fuelled their despair. Indeed, the conditions have generated further accusations that support that the camp has been left to its own fate aiming at deterring migration and also that European Union funds - provided to help Greece to deal with asylum seekers - are being misused. Further to this, in late September 2018, the European Union's anti-fraud agency announced an investigation (EFSYN newspaper, 08/10/2018), while the Head of the Reception and Identification Service (EFSYN newspaper, 04/10/2018), was removed from his post after requesting an investigation.

Indeed, the Reception and Identification Centres on the Aegean islands in Greece (“hotspots”) remained severely overcrowded. Mayors and other residents from islands of Lesbos, Chios and Samos protested in Athens against the increasingly precarious and overcrowded conditions in the hotspots (Kathimerini newspaper, 05/12/2017). The NGO Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF Statement, 04/05/2018) urged the authorities to immediately transfer people from Lesbos to mainland Greece and to scale up the provision of healthcare on the island, also warning about the dramatically worsening conditions there. Serious clashes occurred between Kurds and Arabs in the Reception and Identification Centre in Moria (EFSYN newspaper, 29/05/2018). Further to this, some 300 Syrian and Iraqi asylum applicants left the centre and marched to Mytilene to protest. The hotspot in Samos is also overcrowded threefold in early July, hosting almost 2,700 asylum seekers, with official capacity only at 850 (FRA 2018a, p. 4). The living conditions in reception facilities on the mainland (in Northern Greece and Thiva) have also significantly deteriorated, with serious overcrowding, which has forced people to live in tents, according to media reports (LIFO newspaper, 23/05/2018). As a result, tensions were high in these sites with asylum seekers residing in the Thiva camp occupied the facility for a few days to protest against the living conditions (ARSIS Press release, 29/05/2018).

Those arriving on the islands in recent weeks/months can expect to wait until March (2019) for an interview, while there are currently no state-sponsored lawyers to assist them with their appeal. In 2017, the average waiting period between Skype registration and lodging at the Asylum Service was 81 days. However, there were cases of persons waiting more than six months for an appointment to lodge their application (AIDA 2018). In reality, despite an

increase in calling hours and languages in recent years, the availability of the Skype service remains limited (AIDA 2017, p. 36). The applicants have to try multiple times, often over a period of several months, in order to get through the Skype line so as to arrange an appointment for the registration of their application. These problems have led to official complaints against the Asylum Service for impeding the prospective asylum seekers from registering their applications due to the deficiencies of the Skype system (EFSYN newspaper, 21.08.2018). On the other hand, asylum applications made in the Reception and Identification Centres (RIC) must be referred to the competent Regional Asylum Office. In practice, however, the application is registered by the Reception and Identification Service (RIS) and is then lodged with the Asylum Service. Yet, access to the procedure from pre-removal detention centres remains highly problematic, where registration is conducted by the police or by the RIS in RIC at the border. In 2018, asylum seekers face delays of two weeks to two months for the lodging of their claims in the detention facilities of Amygdaleza and Tavros, and one month in Corinth (AIDA 2018, p. 28).

In a joint statement, 12 humanitarian NGOs criticised the slow transfer of asylum seekers to the mainland (FRA February highlights, 2018). According to media sources (Kathimerini newspaper, 09/10/2018), following migrants' entry through Evros, they undergo reception and identification procedures, which have reportedly improved from inhumane conditions over the recent weeks, largely due to the contribution of NGO operating in the field. Others arrive in Thessaloniki and queue up outside police stations to seek asylum (The Times, 09/10/2018). Recently, a group of Iraqi nationals who had camped in the city centre's Aristotelous Square were transferred to the Diavata camp (Kathimerini newspaper, 09/10/2018).

The National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR Statement, December 2017) issued a set of recommendations on better migration management to the government. These include the transfer of all vulnerable people to urban settings; ensuring the effective operation of the reception facilities; the immediate upgrading of the Reception and Identification and Service (RIS) with sufficient staff and resources, to enable RIS to undertake, as soon as possible, the full administration and overall management of all hotspots from the army; the urgent adoption of standard operating procedures for all reception facilities; the implementation of alternatives to detention; and reforming the guardianship system for unaccompanied children.

In a letter to the House of Representatives, the Dutch Refugee Council¹² raised concerns over the fact that the Netherlands sent, for the first time since 2011, two Dublin returns' requests to Greece. The State Secretary confirmed that requests were sent, but stated that asylum seekers would only be returned to Greece when its reception centres and asylum procedure live up to the standards set by the ECHR. In response, the Dutch Refugee Council underlined that the situation for asylum seekers in Greece is so bad that no one can be returned there.

On 1st June 2018 the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) published preliminary observations on detention facilities in Greece (Council of Europe 2018). The Committee confirmed the persisting reality of wide disparities in standards across Greece's detention centres. On one hand, satisfactory conditions in the pre-removal centres of Amygdaleza and Kos were observed. On the other hand, worrying conditions were reported in the pre-removal centre of Moria on Lesvos, where "*repair works are required and persons are locked in their rooms for around 22 hours per day.*" Yet, the Committee expressed

¹² For more see:

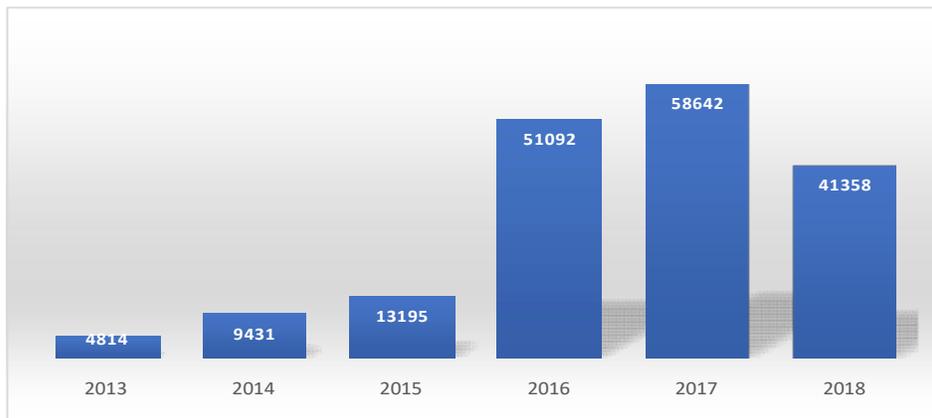
https://www.vluchtelingenwerk.nl/sites/public/Vluchtelingenwerk/nieuws/20180524_VWN_brandbrief%20Griekenland-Dublin%20en%20Turkije.pdf

serious concerns at the abhorrent conditions in the pre-removal centre of Fylakio, while conditions in police stations in the Evros were described as “*grossly sub-standard*”.

6.3 Asylum Seeking Recognition Rates

The developments briefly discussed above have had visible effects on Greece’s asylum system as a sharp increase in asylum applications in 2016, 2017 and 2018 (figure 14).

Figure 14: Lodged Asylum Applications 2013-2018



Source: Asylum Service statistics, 2018

Data for 2013 refer to the period between 7/6/2013 and the end of the year.

Data for 2018 refer to the period between the beginning of the year and 31/8/2018.

Overall in 2017, the Greek Asylum Service registered 58,661 asylum applications of which 26,668 were submitted on the five islands of reception (Lesvos, Chios, Samos, Leros, and Kos). In total, the vast majority of the applications (40,127) were submitted by men, followed by applications submitted by women (18,535), while 2,275 applications concerned cases of unaccompanied minors (table 10). From the 41,358 asylum applications lodged till August 2018, the majority was men (27,890) of the age group 18-34.

Table 10: Application by gender and age 2017-2018

Age	2017			2018		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
0-13	7,614	6,721	14,335	5,267	4,769	10,036
14-17	4,349	1,093	5,442	2,527	702	3,229
18-34	21,473	7,162	28,635	15,514	5,505	21,019
35-64	6,572	3,420	9,992	4,516	2,395	6,911
Over 65	108	130	238	66	97	163
Total	40,116	18,526	58,642	27,890	13,468	41,358

Source: Asylum Service statistics, 2018

With regard to the applicants' nationalities, the majority are Syrians (26.7%), followed by Pakistanis (13.85%), Afghans (13.1%), Iraqis (14.4%) and Albanians (4.6%) (table 11).

Table 11: Asylum applications by country of origin 2017-2018

Country of origin	2017	2018	Total
Syria	16,399	10,323	26,722
Pakistan	8,922	4,932	13,854
Afghanistan	7,566	5,520	13,086
Iraq	7,920	6,483	14,403
Albania	2,450	2,208	4,658
Bangladesh	1,383	971	2,354
Turkey	1,825	2,463	4,288
Iran	1,316	949	2,265
Georgia	1,107	878	1,985
Palestine	1,304	745	2,049
Other countries	8,450	5,886	14,336
Total	58,642	41,358	100,000

Source: Asylum Service statistics, 2018

With regard to recognition rates, the number of those granted refugee status and subsidiary protection has progressively increased from 29.1% in 2016 to 46% and nearly 48% in 2017 and 2018, respectively (table 12).

Table 12: Asylum seeking recognition rates, first instance, 2013-2018

Status \ Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	TOTAL
Refugee status	229	1223	3647	2451	9306	7705	24561
Subsidiary protection	93	487	347	249	1045	1540	3761
Rejected	1754	4254	4434	6587	12137	10136	39302
Inadmissible	261	1453	2019	15240	22465	3397	44835
Discontinuance – Resignation	243	1078	2376	2389	6704	6143	18933
Total	2581	8464	12802	26811	51657	28921	84355
Recognition Rate	15.5%	28.7%	47.4%	29.1%	46.00%	47.70%	41.90%

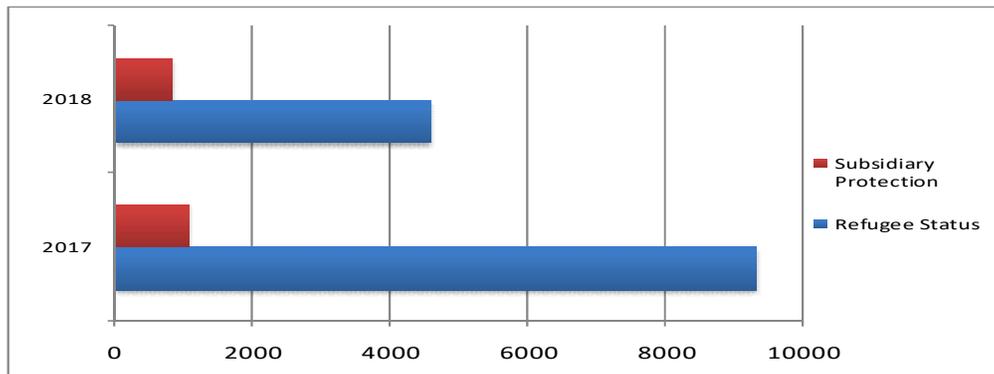
Source: Asylum Service statistics, 2018

Data for 2013 refer to the period between 7/6/2013 and the end of the year.

Data for 2018 refer to the period between the beginning of the year and 31/8/2018.

As for 2017-2018 period the share of international protection's categories show increasing numbers of refugee status' recognitions, while the number of people granted subsidiary protection is stable (figure 15).

Figure 15: Share of international protection's category by year (2017-2018)



Source: Ministry of Migration Policy, 2018

The nationalities with the highest recognition rates are Syrians (99.5%) and Palestinians (93.2%) while the countries of origin of those with the lowest recognition rates are Georgia (0.0%), Albania (0.2%), Ghana (0.6%) and Armenia (0.7%).

Table 13: Countries with highest and lowest recognition rates

10 countries with the highest recognition rates (%)		10 countries with the lowest recognition rates (%)	
Syria	99.7 %	Georgia	0.0 %
Yemen	97.9 %	Albania	0.3 %
Palestine	96.2 %	India	2.2 %
Stateless	88.9 %	Pakistan	2.4 %
Eritrea	86.5 %	Algeria	3.3 %
Somalia	82.1 %	Bangladesh	3.5 %
Afghanistan	70.4 %	Egypt	7.4 %
Iraq	70.0 %	China	8.6 %
Sudan	61.2 %	Nigeria	12.2 %
Iran	59.2 %	Morocco	12.6 %

Source: Asylum Service statistics, 2018

Table 14: Asylum applications by country of origin pending on 31 August 2018

Syria	14280
Afghanistan	8463
Pakistan	3950
Iraq	7065
Pakistan	4911
Other	15372
Total	50091

Source: Asylum Service statistics, 2018

With regard to unaccompanied minors, in 2017-2018, Greece was among the three EU countries (after Italy and Germany) with the highest number of asylum applicants unaccompanied minors (1,671 in 2017 and 1,210 till August 2018). In 2017 alone, the unaccompanied minors in Greece comprised 12.4 share in all minor applicants in EU countries (EUROSTAT newsrelease, 16/05/2018). Of the 2,281 asylum applications submitted by unaccompanied children in 2017 and 2018, a total of 368 cases were granted refugee status, 72 subsidiary protection, while 894 asylum applications received negative first instance decisions (Asylum Service statistics 2018).

6.4 Moving Onwards: Relocation and Family Reunification

The increased inflow of third-country nationals in Greece (and Italy), the vast majority of whom is in need of international protection underlines the need for more support for these countries. The EU's provisional response has been the Emergency Relocation Mechanism, decided on 22 September 2015 (Council Decision (EU) 2015/1601). Following the European Commission's proposals, in an effort to lighten the asylum systems of frontline member-states and provide protection, 160,000 asylum seekers were to be relocated from these Greece and Italy: 66,4000 persons from Greece and 39,000 from Italy by September 2017. The nationalities eligible for relocation under this mechanism were those with a recognition rate of at least 75%¹³ across the EU (UNHCR EU Emergency Relocation Mechanism, as of 21 September 2016)

This scheme, while ambitious in its conception and expressing a strong political will on the part of the President of the European Commission to enforce burden sharing, has had limited results. It has been fraught with implementation problems stemming from the actual pre-registration and processing of people upon first reception in Greece (and Italy), a certain reluctance on the part of the destination member-states, as well as what has been dubbed 'shopping lists' of the people for relocation (for example, vulnerable groups such as unaccompanied minors, single mothers, victims of trafficking, or highly-educated persons). The European Commission (Press release 18/05/2016) has also described as problematic the lacking or unjustified grounds for rejecting relocation requests. However, the Greek Asylum Service explained that following up on rejections of relocation is difficult because of the relocation scheme's overall design given that member-states' sovereign right to refuse to relocate asylum seekers cannot be challenged (AIRE and ECRE 2016). Naturally the whole issue has been further complicated by fears of terrorist infiltration of asylum seekers, particularly from Syria. According to Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) more than 3,800 asylum seekers eligible for family reunification under the Dublin Regulation have been waiting for over six months to depart for Germany (FRA 2018, p. 2)

Responding to legal action taken by Slovakia and Hungary the Court of Justice of the European Union has upheld that the emergency relocation quotas are in line with EU law. While this decision is important at the political level, it probably did not change much in the implementation level where problems and delays have persisted.

As of January 2018, 21,726 asylum seekers had been relocated from Greece to other EU Member States, mainly to Germany, France, the Netherlands and Sweden. Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Malta and Sweden, as well as Norway, Switzerland and Ireland have

¹³ It is important to note here that this rate is according to average quarterly statistics and each time some nationalities risk to being excluded from relocation. This is, for example, the case of Iraqi nationals, whose average recognition rate fell to 73.2% in the first quarter of 2016. Eurostat, First Instance decisions (AIRE, ECRE Report 2016)

fully complied with their obligations under the temporary relocation scheme, according to the Greek government and the International Organization for Migration (FRA 2018, p. 7).

On 8 January 2018, the Ministry of Migration Policy and the International Office for Migration (IOM) held a joint press conference on the conclusion of the EU Relocation Scheme. As per the relevant press release issued by the Asylum Service, 21,726 asylum seekers, predominantly Syrians, (6,982 men, 4,925 women and 9,819 minors) have been relocated from Greece to other EU Member States, since December 2015. The total number was expected to reach over 22,000 asylum seekers (out of 66,400 originally foreseen, 33% of the target), following the completion of pending cases.

According to the same press release, Germany (5,376), France (4,399), the Netherlands (1,748), Sweden (1,658), Finland (1,202), Portugal (1,193) and Spain (1,126) are the Member States which received the largest numbers of asylum seekers, within the framework of the relocation program. Finland (137) and the Netherlands (81), followed by Germany (57), Spain (46) and Ireland (38), received the largest numbers of unaccompanied children.

Based on statistics of the Greek Asylum Service, over 2017 Greece sent 9,675 TakeCharge Requests (TCRs) for family reunification under the EC Dublin III Regulation. In the same period, 7,733 acceptances were received by other EU member states and 4,793 transfers were implemented – compared to 962 transfers in 2016. The majority of outgoing TCRs concerned applications under Articles 9 and 10, followed by Article 17 of the Dublin III Regulation. As of 31 March 2018, 1,690 outgoing TCRs were sent by the Greek Dublin Unit, while 549 acceptances and 747 rejections were received and 1,168 transfers were effectuated (Ministry of Migration Policy, April 2018).

6.5 Policies Addressing Recent Arrivals' Accommodation and Integration Needs

In September 2016, the ministries of Education and Migration presented a plan for the education of refugee children and their integration into the Greek education system. This plan aims at facilitating access to education for all minors living in accommodation structures in Greece. More specifically, it provides for pre-schoolers to be educated through schemes organised in the refugee camps (as parents might feel uncomfortable sending them away to pre-schools) while children of primary and secondary school age will be integrated into local schools.

Other integration measures focusing on children include the UNHCR's program for learning English and their native language aimed at helping children adapt to life in the host countries. UNHCR also supports Greek institutions fostering collaboration between prosecutors and social workers aimed at placing unaccompanied children in foster care within the scope of family reunification.

On 30 July 2017, the Minister of Migration Policy announced that the Ministry is currently working on an integral integration plan focused on education and employment, after systematic assessment of refugees' skills and qualification and consultation with all stakeholders in the field of employment. However, efforts with regards to areas fundamental for the integration of the refugee or migrant community, such as education/training and employment/apprenticeships, are sporadic and mostly originating into civil society (NGOs and international organisations) (Petraou et. al., 2018, p. 62). In this context, YMCA and Solidarity Now, in collaboration with the Metropolitan Development Agency of Thessaloniki and the Municipality of Thessaloniki, announced the launch of a new program during the

coming school year, titled “Enhancing the right to education and access to schooling for refugee children”, and involves two components, focusing on early childhood education and youth school support.

In terms of procedures, the decision by the Director of the Asylum Service on the duration of the validity of the cards of applicants (Decision no. 868/12-01-2018) for international protection for a 6-month period was also adopted in 2018.

With regard to subsidised and other assisted accommodation schemes for asylum seekers there were an estimated 62,292 migrants and refugees in different accommodation facilities on the Greek mainland and islands. This represents a slight increase compared to the 61,692 reported in the previous month. An estimated 31% of people registered as residing in official reception facilities in Greece at the end of August 2018 were registered in the facilities on the islands, while the remaining 69% were registered in different types of accommodation facilities and shelters on the mainland (table 15).

Table 15: Accommodation: total number of places from UNHCR and Operational Partners, August 2018

Type of facilities	Number of accommodated migrants and refugees
Islands	19,597
Open Accommodation Facilities on the mainland	15,628
UNHCR Accommodation Scheme on the mainland	21,192
EKKA13 shelters for adults on the mainland	467
EKKA shelters for Unaccompanied Children (UAC)	3,280
Reception and Identification Centres on the mainland	212
Detention Centres on the mainland	1,916
Total	62,292

Source: IOM Athens, August 2018

Throughout Greece 28 Open Reception Facilities operate with the 26 of them locating in mainland¹⁴ and 2 in islands. Open Reception Facilities provide collective temporary housing to asylum seekers, refugees or persons who are exempted from the return procedure/or whose removal has been postponed. Most are camp-like facilities with housing units (containers), while some are in buildings. They operate under emergency modalities with the involvement of the Hellenic Army while their official establishment under RIS (L.4375/2016) is pending.

Since March 2016, a total of six Reception and Identification Centers¹⁵ (RICs) (1 in mainland and 5 in islands) operate as open accommodation¹⁶ sites for asylum seekers and persons under the return/readmission procedure and until the finalisation of the asylum and

¹⁴Six of them are located in Attika, four in Central Greece, seven in Central Macedonia, two in East Macedonia and Thrace, four in Epirus, two in Thessaly and one in West Greece.

¹⁵under the auspices of the Ministry of Migration Policy-General Secretariat of Reception

¹⁶ Except of the RIC in Fylakio at the land border of Evros is the only one that operates as a closed facility for the purpose of registration for up to 25 days

readmission procedures. In this context, they are responsible for the application of the reception and identification procedures in accordance with L. 4375/2016.

Following the explosive situation in Moria camp, the Ministry of Migration Policy's plan consists in transferring about 2,000 people who are considered "vulnerable" during the next months, mainly from Moria (Kathimerini newspaper, 11/09/2018). Approximately 2,500 accommodation places are expected to be created in the municipalities of Volvi, Stylida and Grevena. Also 1,500 places are expected to be created by increasing the capacity of existing camps and by renting apartments.

With regard to the accommodation of Unaccompanied Children (UAC), as of 31 December 2017, according to the National Centre for Social Solidarity (EKKA), some 3,350 unaccompanied children were estimated to be in Greece. A total of 2,290 were on waiting lists for appropriate shelter. Some of them remained in completely inadequate facilities, including 438 in Reception and Identification Centres (hotspots) and 54 in protective custody (FRA 2018, p. 11). As of 30 June 2018, according to EKKA statistics (30 June 2018), some 3,670 unaccompanied children were estimated to be in Greece, of which 95.5 % were boys. A total of 2,672 unaccompanied children were on waiting lists for appropriate shelter. 349 of them remained in Reception and Identification Centres (hotspots) and 149 in protective custody, mainly at police stations. The total number of available places for unaccompanied children in all of Greece was 1,135. In May 2018, the Special Holding Facility for unaccompanied children (EHPA) in Amygdaleza was once more in use, after having been closed due to inadequate conditions (ARSIS Press release, 08/06/2018). The EHPA in Amygdaleza is supposed to be reactivated following the evacuation of the camps near the port of Patras (FRA Highlights, June 2018). The Directorate General for Social Solidarity of the Ministry of Labor, Social Security and Social Solidarity is designated as the competent Authority for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors and separated Minors, under a three-month transitional provision (Ministry of Migration Policy newsletter, August 2018).

In the framework of the Emergency Support to Integration & Accommodation – ESTIA program – the Greek Government in collaboration with the UNHCR and local authorities provide urban accommodation and cash assistance to refugees and asylum-seekers in Greece. As of 27 February 2018, the total number of accommodation sites (apartments, buildings and hotels) all over Greece within the framework of ESTIA program reached 23,280 where 19,568 people have been hosted. The partners involved in the implementation of the programme are: Municipalities of Athens, Thessaloniki, Livadeia, Larissa, Trikala, Karditsa, Tripoli, Nea Philadelphia-Chalcedon, Iraklion-of Crete, Chania, Rethymnon and Agios Nikolaos as well as seven NGOs.

The Greek government has announced an imminent language and cultural education training programme for children of 15-18 years of age, covering 5,000 people in total in 2018 (Ministry of Migration Policy Press release, 23/01/2018). These children will first undertake fast-track language courses for a smoother transition into formal education. Indeed, all third-country minor or stateless persons during their stay in Greece have the right of access to all levels of public education. Last academic year, over 8,008 refugee children were signed up at schools of all grade levels at regular schools and refugee welcoming centers. Similarly, adult applicants have access to work and attendance of vocational training programs on the same terms as Greek citizens.

The framework for the operation of Reception Structures for Refugee Education (RSRE) for the academic year 2017-18 is defined by a recently published joint ministerial decision (2985/30-08-2017). It defines the place of operation for the RSREs, their schedule, their curriculum, the rules of their operation as well as issues pertaining to their staff and their

duties. According to a recent press conference by the General Secretary of the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs titled “2017-2018: All refugee children in school”, the inclusion of refugee children in public education is a duty and an international commitment of the Greek state, but also the decisive point for the integration of children into Greek society. Refugee children are studying or will soon start studying in about 1,000 schools throughout Greece. The recorded school-aged children (6-16 years of age) population is estimated at 2,493 children in urban areas and 2,360 in Refugee Hosting Structures (Ministry of Education, Research and Religion Press release, 18/10/2017).

Yet, the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs, in cooperation with the Directorate General of Democracy of the Council of Europe, the Hellenic National Academic Recognition Information Centre (Hellenic NARIC) and the Centres for the Recognition of Qualifications (of the ENIC / NARIC) of Norway, the United Kingdom and Italy established in 2017 the pilot programme “qualifications passport for refugees”. During the pilot phase of the program in 2017, three evaluation rounds took place in Athens where 92 refugees were examined, leading to the issuance of 72 European qualification passports.

In an effort to better align with EU law on legal migration, in line with Directive 2014/66/EU, the Migration Code is harmonized with relevant civil partnership/cohabitation legislation. Cases of partners in civil partnership and children recognized under such a pact have been restored. In addition, the residence permit for exceptional reasons is amended and has three-year validity. The only condition for granting the permit is proof of the applicant’s residence in the country for 7 years. Upon receipt of the request, the applicant shall be provided with a receipt stating that a return decision is being impeded for the time required for the processing of the request.

7 Citizenship Acquisitions

In 2017, we observe a significant increase in the number of citizenship acquisitions, mainly due to the sharp increase of acquisition of citizenship through birth or study as well the increase in acquisitions of citizenship by non-co-ethnics, while the acquisition of citizenship in the “other provisions” category appears decreased (as per the reformed Greek citizenship law 1. 4332/19.07.2015) (table 16).

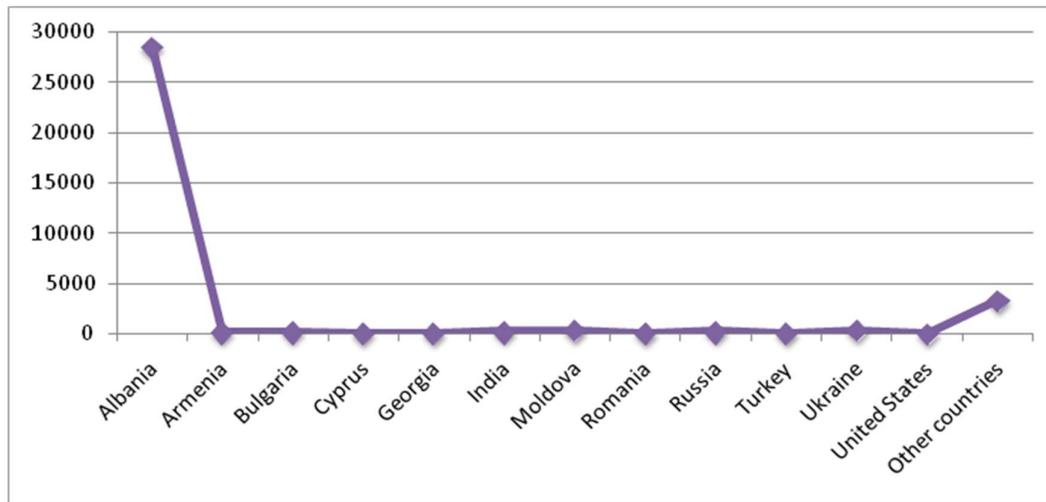
Table 16: Acquisition of Greek Citizenship (2011-2017)

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Naturalisations of co-ethnics	12,616	13,495	22,574	15,791	8,563	7,460	3,689
Naturalisations of other nationalities	930	1,149	1,866	2,019	1,487	3,624	3,483
Birth or study in Greece	3,103	5,543	529	0	305	19,032	24,785
Other provisions	946	928	1,917	2,029	1,529	1,183	979
Under-age children of naturalised adults (parents)	1,627	622	3,337	1,990	2,294	1,515	782
Total	19,222	21,737	30,223	21,829	14,178	32,814	33,718

Source: Ministry of Migration Policy statistics on nationality, 2017

With regard to their previous nationality, the vast majority were Albanians, with 28,536 persons in 2017. As for gender, the percentages of men are slightly higher than those of women, namely 52 versus 48% in 2017 and 54 versus 46% in 2016 (figure 16).

Figure 16: Naturalization rate by country of birth in 2017



Source: Ministry of Migration Policy, 2017

8 Incidents of Racism and Racist Violence

During the last few years, Greek society has been characterized by a paradoxical coexistence of violence that targets refugees and migrants while at the same time, there have been large solidarity movements directed towards them. This trend, together with institutional and legislative developments mostly for the year 2014, was discussed in the 2015 and 2016 reports.

There were some positive developments with regard to combating racist violence in the last two years: On 19 June 2017 a prosecution report has been submitted to the prosecutor of the Supreme Court regarding the racist attacks that have taken place in Goritsa Aspropyrgos during the eight months before the submission which were coordinated and recurring, targeting mainly Pakistani land workers and their Greek employers (HLHR Statement, 19/06/2017).

Furthermore, in March 2017, the European Court of Human Rights has issued a landmark judgment vindicating a group of migrant strawberry pickers who were shot at by employers for asking for their wages after months of unpaid labour, back in 2013, ordering the Greek state to pay damages of up to €16,000 each for having “*failed in its obligations to prevent the situation of human trafficking*” (The Guardian, 30/03/2017).

The European Court of Human Rights - ECtHR held that Greece violated Article 5 (2) ECHR (right to be informed promptly of the reasons for arrest) when detaining three migrants in a reception centre in Chios in order to return them to Turkey under the EU-Turkey Statement. Yet, ECtHR (European Court of Human Rights Judgement, 21/06/2018) held that Greece

violated Article 3 (prohibition of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment) and Article 5 (right to liberty and security) of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) by detaining a Syrian national in a police station with poor conditions pending his return, although the return to Syria was infeasible due to the on-going armed conflict.

In May 2018, NGOs, volunteer groups, scientists and private individuals signed the 'Mytilene Declaration' (May 2018) for the dignified treatment of all missing and deceased persons and their families as a result of migrants' fatal journeys to Europe. The declaration called for States to treat all persons equally, without any kind of discrimination.

Concerning negative developments it should be noted that the extreme-right group 'Krypteia' publicly assumed responsibility for attacks against a number of migrants according to media sources (Iefimerida newspaper, 05/06/2018). This organisation also assumed responsibility for the attack against an abandoned building occupied by migrants in the Attica region, where some 30 members of the extreme-right group invaded the building with bottles and stones, as reported by the media (Iefimerida newspaper, 25/06/2018).

Numerous hate-motivated attacks were reported during the year. Between August 2016 and the end of 2017, over 50 attacks reportedly took place in the town of Aspropyrgos where groups of young locals attacked migrant workers from Pakistan. In June, representatives of national NGOs filed a complaint and authorities launched a criminal investigation. In October, police arrested three young men suspected of being linked to one of the violent attacks (Amnesty International 2018).

In October, Parliament adopted a legislative amendment seeking to implement three European Court of Human Rights judgments. The judgments were regarding the violation of the right to freedom of association in relation to the authorities' refusal to register associations of Greece's national minorities in 2007, 2008 and 2015. The new provision amended the Code of Civil Procedure to allow the possibility of reopening proceedings in these cases. However, the NGO Greek Helsinki Monitor expressed concern over the limitations placed by the law in relation to the reopening of such proceedings, including on grounds of national security and public order (Amnesty International 2018).

9 Emigration of Greeks abroad

It is difficult to have accurate information on Greek emigration abroad as who leave are not required to register, making it difficult to find the necessary data. However, recent research¹⁷ has shed some light on this issue.

According to Eurostat (Newsrelease 25/05/2018) for Greece the employment rates of its citizens in EU countries are higher than those of its co-nationals who live in Greece with 77.3% of Greeks in other EU countries are employed, compared with 57.8% of the respective population in Greece (a difference of 19.5 pp.).

The percentage of Greek citizens of working age (20-64) living in another Member State in 2017 (as % of their home-country resident population in the corresponding age group) are as follows:

¹⁷ In recent years, there has been substantial research in the qualitative and quantitative characteristics of the phenomenon. To mention some, Lazaretou 2016, Labrianidis and Pratsinakis 2016, ICAP group 2015,2016, Endeavor Greece 2014 and EUI 2013).

Figure 17: Greek citizens living in another member state in 2017

2007 (%)	2012 (%)	2017 (%)	Change 2007/2017, p.p.
4.7	4.7	6.0	1.4

Source: Eurostat Newsrelease, 25/05/2018

Beyond the resurgence of ‘refugee emergency’ and related flows, Greece has been overall losing population of both natives (citizens) and settled migrants. Greeks, particularly those educated, have been emigrating to other EU countries in significant numbers and the settled migrant population has also been decreasing. According to Eurostat (2018, p. 3) the share of Greek citizens of working age (20-64) living in another Member State in 2017 (as % of their home-country resident population in the corresponding age group) reached 6.0%, showing an increase of 1.4% from 2007 to 2017. In addition formerly settled migrants have also continued leaving the country. It is estimated that more than 120,000 non-EU nationals left the country over the years 2014 to 2016 alone (EL.STAT 2017). Despite the lack of reliable estimates by citizenship, it appears that the negative migration balance is mainly related to the return migration of people from Albania, Ukraine, Moldova and Russia (EL.STAT. 2017) to their places of origin. According to EL.STAT (2017) in 2017 the permanent resident population in Greece was slightly under 10.8 million (10.768.193), having decreased by 0,14% compared to 2016 (10.783.748) mainly because of out-migration.

10 Concluding Remarks

While Greece seems to be entering a path of financial stability as regards its public finance, and the overall growth and employment situation is gradually improving, the challenges it faces on the immigration and asylum seeking front have all but receded. Immigration and asylum seeking flows via the Greek Turkish sea and land borders have increased during 2018, leading to the re-opening of emergency accommodation in hotels and camps (that had been used in the 2015 emergency but were since abandoned).

At the same time it is important to note that Greece has a stable, well settled migrant population which by now holds long term permits at a 40% rate. Interestingly such permits along with family reunification permits form now the vast majority of all stay permits for third country nationals residing in Greece. In addition the naturalisation provisions that came into effect in 2015 have led to increasing numbers of citizenship acquisitions mostly by children born in Greece or who came to the country at a young age and have attended Greek schools (33,000 naturalisations in 2017 of which about 2/3s were for children of the second or 1.5 generation). Befallen irregularity and permits on exceptional grounds have also been decreasing testifying to the stabilisation of the long term settled population in the country.

These developments suggest that Greece is faced with a bifurcated migration reality. On one hand a long term settled population that has changed the ethnic demographic composition of the citizenry and of the resident population and which has increasingly been socio-economically integrated, and on the other hand, a recently arrived population of mostly

asylum seekers that remains in precarious living conditions even if efforts are made to stabilise and integrate it. A related challenge remains the islands where tens of thousands of people are stuck, without good prospects of either going forward or going back, in inhumane living conditions. It appears that the situation on the islands will not improve significantly in the months or even years to come because the dire conditions there and the limited hope for transfers to the mainland or other countries act as deterrence factors to those who seek international protection outside the Middle East. However, even if managing the flows is a legitimate policy objective both at the national (Greek) and the EU level, it is not legitimate nor acceptable to keep people in inhumane conditions, lacking access to basic facilities, for months on end. This is of course a moral and political dilemma for both Greece and the entire EU.

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