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## EU-Turkey Statement: Six years of undermining refugee protection

### 8 NGOs warn that policies implemented in Greece keep displaced people from accessing asylum procedures, despite clear need of protection

March 2022 marks six years since the [EU-Turkey Statement](#) was agreed, which stipulated that people crossing irregularly to the Greek islands from Turkey would be returned there.

Six years later, this “*temporary and extraordinary measure*” has become a hallmark of the [EU shirking its responsibility to protect refugees](#).

Over [2,100 people](#) who made the difficult and often very dangerous journey to reach the islands of Greece have been returned to Turkey. Thousands whose applications were rejected as inadmissible are currently stuck in limbo as Turkey has not been receiving returnees since March 2020.

#### Access to asylum further restricted

Worryingly, the impact of the EU-Turkey Statement has been further compounded by a Greek Joint Ministerial Decision (JMD) in June 2021, which [designated Turkey as a ‘safe third country’ for people from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Somalia, as well as Syria](#).

While the EU-Turkey ‘Deal’ impacted people seeking protection on the islands, this JMD applies to asylum seekers anywhere in Greece. Based on this new policy, asylum applications of people from these five nationalities will not be examined based on their individual circumstances and the risks they face in their country of origin. Instead, they are presumed to be safe in Turkey, and only if Turkey is proven not to be safe, are these applications deemed ‘admissible’, and Greece will examine them.

The five nationalities mentioned in the JMD accounted for [60% of all asylum applications in Greece last year](#).

#### Refugees specifically targeted

Three out of the five nationalities mentioned in the JMD are those who are most often recognised as refugees in Greece. In 2020, before the JMD, [92% of Syrians, 66% of Afghans, and 94% of Somalis \(median acceptance rate: 84%\) received refugee or subsidiary status](#).

Following the JMD, however, rejections have risen sharply. In 2021, there were 6,424 rejections of applications as “inadmissible” – a 126% increase on 2020. Out of the 12,570 decisions of admissibility on the basis of the JMD in 2021 (from 7 June to 31 December 2021) of the five nationalities, [47% \(5,907\) were found inadmissible](#).

This means that almost half of all applications of people from these nationalities are not examined on the merits. People with marginalised identities or conditions deemed “vulnerabilities”, including thousands of children, are not excluded from these policies.

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## Asylum seekers in limbo

March 2022 also marks two years since Turkey stopped accepting returns from Greece. This means that for the past two years people deemed ‘inadmissible’ have been stuck in Greece in a legal limbo: they have no access to asylum or documents indicating their legal status, and no right to housing, cash assistance, work, [or catering services in the camps they reside in](#).

Moreover, In December 2021, Greece [added Albania and Northern Macedonia to the list of safe third countries](#), further externalising its obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention.

[Recent legislation](#) saw the introduction of a 100€ per person fee for asylum seekers who wish to re-apply for asylum, including those deemed ‘inadmissible’. A couple with 3 children would have to pay 500€ to re-apply. For individuals and families who have no financial assistance and limited or no right to work, [this fee is a further – and insurmountable – barrier to their right to seek asylum](#).

## Instead of responsibility sharing, deterrence has become the top priority

The impressive mobilisation of the EU and its member states in response to the arrival of over 3 million refugees from Ukraine in the last month shows that Europe has the capacity to welcome refugees in a coordinated, fair, and humane way when it has the will. In marked contrast, the EU Turkey Deal was a panicked response in the face of deep divisions by member states. In the absence of a comprehensive responsibility sharing system, the primary aim of the Deal, and its successor policies, has been to deter refugee arrivals. The Deal marked the beginning of a series of hostile policies towards refugees, an outsourcing of responsibility and a dependence on third countries, that must be abandoned.

[The Greek Ministry of Migration and Asylum measures success by ‘border controls’, ‘low flows’, ‘decongestion’ and decreased number of asylum applications](#). The protection of people fleeing violence and persecution does not seem to be a priority. These policies violate Greece's international obligation to grant effective and unhindered access to asylum to those seeking international protection.

Based on the above, the co-signing NGOs recommend that:

1. Greece and the EU should abandon the safe third country concept and retract the EU-Turkey Statement
2. Greece should revoke the Joint Ministerial Decision designating Turkey a safe third country
3. Greece should commit to ensuring all asylum applications are examined on their individual merits
4. Greece should immediately rescind the 100€ fee for individuals seeking to submit a subsequent asylum application
5. Greece should immediately address the legal limbo of people affected by the JMD by affording them the right to legally stay, work and move freely in the country until their asylum claims are examined on their merits.