

TWO YEARS SINCE THE EU – TURKEY DEAL | A TIMELINE

Since January 2015, more than 1 million people fleeing war, persecution and poverty entered or passed through Greece in search of safety and a better life, and more than 1,200 were reported dead or missing. During the latter part of 2015 and early 2016, selective and arbitrary admission policies were put in place by various European countries that eventually closed their borders to all migrants. On 20 March 2016, the EU-Turkey Deal came into effect whereby all migrants arriving irregularly on to the Greek islands would be returned to Turkey. This is a two-year timeline of the major events since the implementation of the EU-Turkey Deal, depicting policies and efforts that chip away at the rights and protections for asylum seekers arriving to the EU.



Kouvaras/AA, Lesvos 2016

Asylum applications with the Greek Asylum Service **increase by 287.2%** compared to 2015. Greece adopts a **new Asylum Law**, partly to implement the EU-Turkey Deal. Piraeus, the port of Greece, becomes one of the largest makeshift refugee camps hosting more than **2,500** persons who cannot continue their journey.

Horrific conditions in camps for refugees on the islands. A grandmother and her small grandchild are killed by an **explosion** in their tent in Moria camp, Lesvos.

2017

January 2017

Heavy snowfall on Lesvos brings to the fore the unacceptable living conditions of refugees. Three asylum seekers die in Moria, Lesvos, apparently trying to get warm.

"There are men but also women in the tents. With the snow, I thought I would die of the cold. My tent was covered in snow and you couldn't see its surface" by Alain, 32-year-old man from Cameroon, Moria, Lesvos

March 2017

13 NGOs join forces urging the Greek Parliament to reject any changes to legislation based on the European Commission's Joint Action Plan which will worsen the situation for Greek islanders and further erode the rights of asylum seekers.

September 2017

Employees of the Reception and Identification Service write an **open letter to the Ministry of Migration Policy** asking for a dignified working framework and condemning the conditions of the camps, which endanger both the employees and the asylum seekers.

November 2017

The General Commission of Administrative Courts of Greece issues recommendations on the acceleration of the proceedings of claims for international protection, which **limit rights and curtail procedural guarantees** for asylum seekers.

2018

February 2018

Changes are announced for the medical assessment of asylum seekers' vulnerabilities, which directly affect the asylum process. **New amendments on the asylum law** are now also announced, whereby the European Asylum Support Office will have a more expanded role in the asylum interviews causing a higher risk that vulnerable people will not be identified. **Dangerous overcrowding in camps on the islands persists.**

2016

20 March

Introduction of the **EU – Turkey Deal**. From this date, refugees on the mainland and the islands live two very different realities.

"We were fighting against terrorists. I was so naïve to think that Europe would welcome us with open arms just because of that. But when we arrived I realised that people think that we are the terrorists. I am only a mother who wants her children to go to school and live in safety", Sherine from Syria, Port of Piraeus

October 2016 12 NGOs publish a joint report explaining the situation for those stranded in Greece for over six months and offering recommendations.

December 2016 A Joint Action Plan for the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement is published by the European Commission and the Greek authorities, with proposals that water down the protection safeguards of refugees in Greece. **62,455 asylum seekers** are stranded in Greece.



Tolis/IRC, Lesvos 2018

February 2017 The General Court of the EU rules that it has no jurisdiction to challenge the legitimacy of the deal. It was the member states and not the EU that signed it. At the same time, UNHCR and many NGOs report a significant **increase in suicide attempts** by asylum seekers trapped on the islands.

May 2017 15 NGOs decry new policy excluding asylum seekers on the Greek islands who appeal negative asylum decisions from the possibility of returning to their home countries voluntarily through an assisted programme by the IOM.

October 2017 More than 2,800 people are living in the hotspot in Samos, a facility with a maximum capacity of just 700. **Dangerous overcrowding** in Lesvos and Chios, too. **19 NGOS write an open letter to the Greek Prime Minister Tsipras** calling for the immediate transfer of asylum seekers to the mainland to meet their protection needs.

December 2017

15 NGOs launch a roadmap for the handover of the refugee response to the Greek Government. Under pressure, **the Greek Government announces that a one-off emergency exercise for the transfer of more than 5,000** people from the islands will take place before winter sets in.

"I can't handle this. Sometimes I think it would have been better to have been killed in Afghanistan." Woman sharing a tent with 17 other people, Moria, Lesvos

17 March 2018

Small boat sinks off Greek island, **killing 16 people including at least five children.**