

## GREECE

### Contribution to the first regional review of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in the UNECE region

Athens, 4 November 2020

Greece, as an EU Member State at the external borders of the Union, is confronted with multiple challenges and increased responsibilities in the area of migration. In recent years, the country has been significantly affected by large-scale mixed flows of irregular migrants and asylum seekers heading towards the EU. In 2019 there have been more than 139 000 arrivals of migrants and asylum seekers in the EU, with more than 77 000 of them (55%) having arrived in Greece alone. Still, these numbers pale in comparison to the number of arrivals in late 2015 or 2016. In addition, Greece hosts almost 650.000 legally residing migrants who have settled in the country, with their families, through successive immigration waves since the beginning of the 1990s.

Based on this experience, we are convinced that international and regional cooperation is critical in effectively managing international migration. Such cooperation should be based on genuine solidarity and shared responsibility, while respecting national sovereignty, national competences and national legislation, in line with the right of each State to decide who will enter to its territory and under which process.

In this spirit, we appreciate the UN Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (hereafter GCM), as a major political framework of international cooperation that reflects the common will of the international community to address the migration phenomenon and its implications as a common geopolitical challenge.

In our view, the GCM also offers participating States the opportunity to check national migration policies against a set of fundamental, commonly agreed principles. As a first result of this exercise, Greece's migration policy, which is already fully harmonized with relevant EU *acquis*, is also aligned with the **guiding principles of the GCM**. Indeed, our approach to international migration gives a central role to *international cooperation*, while underlining the fundamental importance of *national sovereignty*, the *rule of law and due process*, as well as the national competence on labour market management. Our policy protects and safeguards *human rights*, seen as a horizontal obligation to be observed at all times and acknowledges the *human dimension* that is inherent in the migration process. We aim to increase the linkages between *migration and development policy* in the framework of a *whole-of-government* approach and to involve all relevant stakeholders in a well-organised *whole-of-society* approach. Last but not least, our national migration policy remains *gender-responsive* and is *child sensitive*, placing the interest of the child at the center of all our efforts.

Working towards the fulfillment of the **objectives of the GCM** is a dynamic on-going process, with the efficient coordination of action being a key element. This is facilitated in Greece by the establishment and functioning of a separate Ministry of Migration and Asylum, tasked with policy design and implementation in the respective areas, in close cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Citizen Protection and competent sectoral Ministries. It is worth mentioning that the Ministry of Migration and Asylum includes, in addition to the central supportive units, a General Secretariat for Migration Policy, a General Secretariat for the Reception of Asylum Seekers, as well as two Special Secretariats which reflect respective policy



priorities: one for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors and a one for the Coordination of Stakeholders.

At this stage, an initial “mapping” exercise is taking place by the competent departments of the Ministry of Migration & Asylum, in order to identify national policies that already support the GCM objectives, as well as the gaps and areas where more action is needed. Other Ministries will be involved in this exercise, as per their area of competence.

Without losing sight of the strong interdependence between the GCM objectives, we place special emphasis, during this initial phase of GCM implementation, to those objectives that are most relevant to our current national priorities in the area of migration and to the urgent challenges that we are confronted with. We, therefore, focus, at this stage, on the following nine (9) objectives:

- we aim to produce more timely, policy-relevant disaggregated migration data and to increase the transparency and promote the dissemination of those data (*objective 1*);
- we support circular migration and capacity-building projects and other actions contributing to the socio-economic development of origin countries, in line with a “more-for more” approach and the principle of conditionality (*objective 2*);
- we develop legislation and actions in order to ensure the availability of options and pathways for well-organized regular migration, in line with national labour market needs and capacities and in order to safeguard migrants’ legal status of residence, taking also into account the current challenges related to COVID-19 pandemic (*objective 5*);
- we intensify our efforts towards a more effective response to migrant smuggling which is a criminal activity posing threat both to irregular/illegal migrants and to our law enforcement, migration and asylum services (*objective 9*);
- we mobilize all the relevant national authorities and cooperate with civil society actors, in a coordinated effort to prevent and combat trafficking in persons and protect its victims (*objective 10*);
- we ensure the management of our national borders, which are also the European Union external borders, in an integrated, secure and coordinated manner, in line with the 2019 National Strategy for Integrated Border Management (*objective 11*);
- we develop national legislation that safeguards human rights and ensures migrants’ access to basic services, with a special emphasis on protecting children in the migration process, in particular unaccompanied minors and caring for their needs, while Migrant Integration Centers across the country offer specialized services to migrants (*objective 15*);
- we have planned the implementation of programmes to promote migrants’ integration in Greek society and the labour market and to raise awareness of the host population (*objective 16*); and
- we place particular emphasis and take a number of initiatives, at national and EU level, in view of establishing a Common European Return Mechanism to promote effective return and readmission, which we consider to be an indispensable component for managing migration (*objective 21*).

Our approach to the abovementioned GCM objectives and relevant action already taken is further developed in *Annex*. However, while focusing on those areas at this stage, policy gaps and opportunities in relation to all 23 objectives are being identified. The result of this exercise will provide the basis for the preparation of the overall national response to the GCM.



## Annex

### *Greece's approach and actions in relation to the GCM objectives identifies as priority ones*

**Objective 1. Collect and utilize accurate and disaggregated data as a basis for evidence-based policies.** Greece fully implements the European Regulation on migration and international protection statistics, as in force, and is in close cooperation with Eurostat, as well as the OECD, for producing and disseminating reliable migration statistics. We now focus on producing more timely and policy-relevant migration data and on increasing the transparency and promoting the dissemination of those data, through the monthly on-line publication of migration statistics and the enhanced cooperation between the Ministry of Migration and Asylum and relevant authorities of other Ministries, in particular the Hellenic Police and Coast Guard, as well as the Hellenic Statistical Authority.

**Objective 2. Minimize the adverse drivers and structural factors that compel people to leave their country of origin.** Greece aims to promote circular migration schemes, which facilitate the transfer of know-how to the migrants' origin communities. We are also actively engaged in the on-going Regional Processes for the cooperation between the EU and third countries in the area of migration. In this framework, we support the implementation of capacity-building projects and other initiatives that contribute to the socio-economic development of origin countries with the aim to address the so-called "push factors". These initiatives need to be implemented in accordance with the conditionality principle, to ensure effective cooperation between origin and destination countries on all the dimensions of migration management, including the most challenging ones, such as return and readmission.

**Objective 5. Enhance availability and flexibility of pathways for regular migration.** Greece pays particular attention to the availability of regular migration options and pathways. In this respect, legislation and actions are being developed with the aim to: a) facilitate migration for studies to Greek Universities and other educational institutions, through *-inter alia -* an accelerated and facilitated visa and permit processing for students; b) facilitate family reunification, in respect of the right to family life, while ensuring appropriate living conditions for family members who are allowed to migrate to Greece; c) promote migration for investment to real estate and other forms of investment (e.g. direct or indirect investments to enterprises or the stock market); d) develop accelerated and facilitated visa and permit processing for business executives under a new business short stay visa program. In addition, we aim to further promote the long-term residence statuses provided for by Immigration Law (in particular EU long-term and "second generation" permit), which grant foreigners rights similar to those of Greek citizens and to develop a large-scaled IT system to facilitate the administrative procedures by allowing for an electronic application for residence permit. Moreover, considering the overall positive experience from the implementation of bilateral employment agreements with Egypt and Albania, we examine the possibility to conclude bilateral agreements with other third countries presenting increased migration interest for Greece; such agreements could provide for flexible labour mobility schemes, including seasonal or temporary migration, in accordance with, on the one hand, national labour market needs and skills supply, and, on the other hand, the conditionality principle that ensures effective cooperation in the field of return.

Greece has responded swiftly to the COVID-19 pandemic. In terms of migration management, the Ministry of Migration and Asylum has taken all the necessary measures in order to safeguard the rights of third country citizens, legally residing in Greece, by extending the validity of respective residence titles, i.e. national D visas (required in specific cases, including seasonal work), or



residence permit. These measures allowed interested third country citizens to apply for a residence permit or its renewal at a later stage, without any administrative sanctions being imposed on them due to delayed submission of the application. In parallel, applicants may submit any additional supporting documents in relation to pending applications for granting a residence permit only by registered mail, thus avoiding physical contacts with immigration authorities. Currently, the Ministry of Migration and Asylum is examining the possibility to update the IT migration system in order to introduce the on-line application for initial granting or renewal of residence permit, which would require applicants' physical presence only for the purpose of collecting the necessary biometric data (fingerprints, photo and signature).

**Objective 9. Strengthen the transnational response to smuggling of migrants.** Migrants' smuggling is a criminal activity posing threat both to irregular migrants and to our law enforcement, migration and asylum services. Within the framework of the National Strategy for Integrated Border Management, two important strategic objectives have been set: a) the dismantling of organized criminal networks with cross-border action and b) the strengthening of on-going law enforcement operations at the external borders. The Hellenic Police implements preventive and repressive actions to deal with smuggling of migrants and other forms of cross-border crime. In this regard, the analysis of information and relevant common databases is being used, while emphasis is given to the training of staff. In order to combat migrants' smuggling, Greece is cooperating with the other EU Member States and relevant EU Agencies, such as Europol and the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, *inter alia*, by conducting joint operational actions. Through this kind of cooperation, we aim to promote communication with neighboring non EU countries, as well.

**Objective 10. Prevent, combat and eradicate trafficking in persons in the context of international migration.** Trafficking in human beings is a transnational, multifaceted criminal phenomenon that requires national mobilization and international cooperation. The national legal framework for combating Human Trafficking is fully harmonized with international conventions and EU *acquis*. The Office of the National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings is established within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and is mandated to cooperate with all competent Ministries and State agencies, as well as International Organisations and civil society stakeholders. In parallel, the Hellenic Police Headquarters monitors the national and international developments regarding human trafficking and utilises relevant reports of international organizations (Europol, Eurojust, Selec, UNODC, etc.) in order to efficiently direct first-line services and, thus, optimize efficiency in locating, managing and investigating relevant cases. The Hellenic Police, as well as other State agencies involved in the fight against human trafficking cooperate closely with civil society actors to ensure the provision of assistance and protection to victims of human trafficking

**Objective 11. Manage borders in an integrated, secure and coordinated manner.** Greece places particular emphasis on managing our borders, which are also the external borders of the European Union. Our country implements the Regulation (EU) 2019/1896 on the European Border and Coast Guard, which includes the European Integrated Border Management (articles 3 and 8). In the framework of article 8 par. 6 of the abovementioned Regulation, is provided that all MS, including Greece, should draft a national strategy for the European Integrated Border Management. The National Strategy for Integrated Border Management was developed in 2019, and consists of the following measures and activities: border controls, risk analysis, information exchange, inter-service cooperation, cooperation with EU institutions, cooperation with third countries, technical and operational equipment, returns of third-country nationals, the use of advanced technology and regular evaluation. As part of this National Strategy, fundamental rights,



education and training, as well as research and innovation become key elements.

**Objective 15. Provide access to basic services for migrants.** National legislation safeguards human rights of all migrants, as well as access to basic services, with a special emphasis on the needs of children in the migration process. The Immigration and Social Integration Code (Law 4251/2014, as in force) stipulates that minor third country citizens residing in Greece are subject to the same requirement of compulsory education as Greek citizens and have unlimited access to the activities of school or academic communities. Accordingly, migrants' children may be enrolled to public schools irrespective of their parents' or guardians' resident status. Third country minors have also full access to public health services, while all third country citizens have free access in case of emergency. The Code also facilitates the access of those third country citizens who fulfill the relevant requirements to long-term resident statuses (in particular EU long-term and "second generation" permit) that are associated with increased rights, similar to those of Greek citizens. The Code aims to ensure the legal status of residence of third country citizens and facilitate migrants in vulnerable situation in maintaining or regaining legal status of residence, which is critical when it comes to exercising their rights and lifting exclusion from their access to social goods and services (education, labour market, public health services etc). Furthermore, the Migrant Integration Centres (MICs) operating across the country provide a number of specialized services to third country citizens, while the provision of intercultural mediation services will be strengthened through the implementation of a relevant programme funded by the European Social Fund. It is also worth mentioning that specific guidelines for the protection against COVID-19, translated in 6 languages have been forwarded to the MICs, so as to reach the migrant communities.

**Objective 16. Empower migrants and societies to realize full inclusion and social cohesion.** The Migrant Integration Centres (MICs) operating across the country provides specialized services to third country citizens living in Greece, offer Greek language courses, implement actions to promote migrants' access to the labour market and facilitate networking. To further promote migrants' integration, a number of actions and programmes have been planned and are to be implemented in 2020, such as, for example, the training of intercultural mediators and their placement in Community Centres and MICs, the performance of "intercultural tours" by migrants and refugees to Museums and archaeological sites of Athens, as well as a sensitization campaign addressed to the receiving society on issues of migration and integration.

**Objective 21. Cooperate in facilitating safe and dignified return and readmission, as well as sustainable reintegration.** Effective return policy is indispensable for managing migration. As an EU Member-State, Greece supports the need for a strengthened European return policy, including a Common European Return Mechanism and has presented a relevant concept paper to its European counterparts. In our view, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, through its new return mandate, as well as the European Network of Immigration Liaison Officers deployed in third countries have an important role to play in promoting effective return and readmission of third country nationals who do not have the right to stay in the territory of EU Member States. To achieve better results in the field of return and readmission, cooperation between origin and destination countries needs to be based on a more-for-more approach, in line with the principle of conditionality and promote sustainable reintegration of returnees, in particular through AVRR projects. Greece makes intensive efforts to that direction through its initiatives at EU level, as well as through bilateral discussions with selected third countries.