



MINISTRY OF MIGRATION & ASYLUM

First International Migration Review Forum on the UN Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration

Voluntary GCM Review by Greece

May 2022

Greece welcomed 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.

As an EU Member State at the external borders of the Union, Greece is confronted with multiple challenges and increased responsibilities in the area of migration management. After having been affected by large-scale mixed flows of irregular migrants and asylum seekers heading towards the EU some years ago, the country has since gained control over the migration situation and has accumulated significant experience.

Based on that experience we are convinced international cooperation is of crucial importance in effectively managing migration. It 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.

GCM offers participating States the opportunity to check national migration policies against a set of fundamental, commonly agreed principles. Greece's migration policy, being already fully harmonized with relevant EU *acquis*, is aligned with the **guiding principles of the GCM**. Indeed, our approach to migration prioritises *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. Finally, our national migration policy remains *gender-responsive* and is *child sensitive*, placing the best 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 actions and stakeholders being a key element. This is facilitated in Greece by the establishment of the Ministry of Migration & Asylum, a dedicated Ministry 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, in addition to the central supportive units, the Ministry of Migration & Asylum includes 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: a Special Secretariat for the Coordination of Stakeholders and another one for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors.

We wish to highlight the establishment of the Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors in 2020, within the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, as a flagship initiative and a **good practice** that has contributed significantly to the improvement of the child protection system in Greece. The Secretariat, as a designated authority for all matters concerning the protection of unaccompanied children, is competent for the development, implementation and supervision of the National Strategy for the protection of the unaccompanied and separated minors living in Greece. It manages accommodation and relocation requests according to needs and assessment of the best interest of the child, defines and supervises quality standards for the operation of accommodation facilities, supports social integration and safeguards the protection of unaccompanied minors residing in Greece, in cooperation with NGOs and international organizations. The Secretariat has undertaken a number of initiatives, including the abolition of the protective custody at police stations and the establishment of a National Emergency Response Mechanism for Unaccompanied Minors in precarious living conditions. Moreover, since September 2021, the Secretariat is also competent for the guardianship of unaccompanied minors.

Regarding the overall national migration policy, the following are top priorities for Greece:

- Border protection in compliance with international law
- Combatting trafficking in human beings and migrants' smuggling
- Preventing irregular migration and enhancing return and reintegration
- Protection of unaccompanied minors
- Social Integration of migrants and refugees
- Legal migration with a focus on pathways that contribute to development, including migration for temporary employment to meet both labour market needs and migrants' expectations or for investment activities.

Without losing sight of the strong interdependence between the 23 GCM objectives, special emphasis is placed on those objectives that are most relevant to the abovementioned national priorities. In this spirit, the present contribution, based on various inputs from Ministries with competences pertaining to migration policy, updates our previous contribution to the 2020 relevant regional GCM review, and focuses on selected key objectives of the GCM.

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 focus on producing more timely and policy-relevant migration data and on increasing the transparency and promoting the dissemination of this data. For this purpose enhanced cooperation has been established between the Ministry of Migration & Asylum and relevant authorities of other Ministries, in particular the Hellenic Police and Coast Guard, as well as the Hellenic Statistical Authority.

On a monthly basis newsletters are uploaded on the website of the MMA presenting statistical and analytical data on migration flows, arrivals in the country, situation in the reception facilities, figures regarding processing of applications for legal residence and asylum and trends in migration and asylum procedures, including main nationalities. A press release is also published with a synopsis of the developments.

National authorities make use of various sources from EU and international organizations that offer valuable information about different routes, patterns and profiles regarding movements from countries of origin and transit countries to the EU, thus contributing to establishing evidence-based migration policies at national level.

Objective 2. Minimize the adverse drivers and structural factors that compel people to leave their country of origin.

Greece is actively engaged in the on-going Regional Processes for the cooperation between the EU and third countries in 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.

A new model of migration policy towards main countries of origin has been promoted aiming at better cooperation in the field of migration and mobility, including returns. In this respect,

circular migration schemes are expected to facilitate the transfer of know-how to the migrants' origin communities while producing benefits for the national economy. By engaging in bilateral meetings at highest level and with the assistance of diplomatic authorities, Greece developed initiatives with specific migrants' origin countries of interest, resulting in bilateral commitments to the benefit of both sides. As a result, in February 2022, a Memorandum of Understanding on migration and mobility was signed between Greece and Bangladesh, as well as a Declaration of Intent on migration and mobility between Greece and Pakistan and between Greece and India.

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 and in particular EU long-term and "second generation" permits, which grant non-EU citizens, rights similar to those of Greek and EU citizens.

Recognizing the importance of transnational cooperation in promoting organized and safe migration, Greece is engaged in the implementation of bilateral agreements, such as the one with Canada on Youth Mobility, the one with Albania on Seasonal employment of labor force and the one with Egypt on the Promotion of bilateral cooperation concerning labor matters, which is expected to be expanded into a new framework for the invitation of seasonal workers in the agricultural sector. Such agreements could provide for labour mobility schemes, such as seasonal or temporary employment, that meet the national labour market needs and skills supply and could facilitate cooperation on all areas of migration management, including safe and dignified return and reintegration. It is also worth mentioning that a recent amendment of the Greek Immigration Law facilitates seasonal employment of third country (non-EU) citizens, who, now, have the possibility to reside in Greece for a period of up to nine (9) months in total, per period of twelve (12) months, as seasonal workers in the agricultural sector.

Furthermore, the innovative scheme for Digital Nomads offers the opportunity to third country citizens who are self-employed, entrepreneurs, employees or freelancers to reside in Greece, under specific conditions. It aims at attracting high-skilled and high-income nomads and, at the same time, enhance the visibility and the attractiveness of Greece to the new Global Digital

Economy.

Greece has responded swiftly to the COVID-19 pandemic. In terms of migration management, the Ministry of Migration & 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. The Ministry of Migration & Asylum has updated the IT migration system introducing the on-line application for residence permits, which would require applicants' physical presence only for the purpose of collecting the necessary biometric data.

Objective 9. Strengthen the transnational response to smuggling of migrants.

The fight against smugglers is a priority for Greece. We have been active at European level but also in regional cooperation networks to reinforce action, including the implementation of initiatives in the countries of origin and transit

Greece has a firm position against the activities of migrants' smugglers which represent a threat to migrants themselves, as well as to 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.

Enhanced intelligence concerning the routes, profiles, modus operandi and networks of smugglers is a necessity in order to monitor and confront their criminal activities. 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, established within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was mandated to cooperate with all competent Ministries and State agencies, as well as International Organizations and civil society stakeholders. In this framework and in collaboration with the National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings, a Special Working Group was set up in July 2021 to protect victims of trafficking in human beings, in order to achieve a comprehensive picture and assessment of the situation in Greece. The aim is to form a forum for communication, exchange of ideas and practices and formulation of guidelines by the service agents with similar competencies, as well as to achieve a well-documented analysis of the situation, highlighting good practices and weaknesses in the implementation of anti-trafficking legislation.

In parallel, the Hellenic Police Headquarters monitors the national and international developments regarding human trafficking and utilizes 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.

Furthermore, in July 2021 the National Strategy to combat Human Trafficking 2021-2025 was presented by the Greek Ministry of Citizens' Protection. In line with the commitment of the Greek State to prevent and deal with all forms of crime, especially those with a strong social impact, the strategy sets out the following six main priorities: a) Better coordination and strengthening of the operational capacity of the Hellenic Police in combating human trafficking, b) Timely identification and protection of victims, with emphasis on preventing Secondary Victimization, focusing on minors, especially those coming from vulnerable social groups, c) Preventing trafficking in human beings and protecting vulnerable groups from possible victimization, d) Combating effectively the organized human trafficking networks, e) Strengthening cooperation among competent services f) Strengthening cross-border cooperation on cases involving transnational criminal groups.

In this respect, it is worth mentioning that the operation of the National Emergency Response Mechanism (NERM), by the Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors of the Ministry of Migration & Asylum aims to create a safety net and offer protection to the most vulnerable of UAMs, i.e. those who are homeless or in precarious accommodation conditions, such as children temporarily accommodated by unrelated adults, living in squats or in makeshift constructions. These children are in grave risk of falling victim to trafficking networks and being subject to abuse, violence, or exploitation and are often trapped in forced labour, criminality,

or sexual work. NERM aims at the timely identification of children in need or at risk, including child victims of trafficking, and ensures immediate intervention and protection. Therefore, NERM stands as a preventive measure against trafficking, by offering protection to a hitherto, largely undetected population, namely unaccompanied children who have entered Greece irregularly and most of whom would, otherwise, remain unregistered, not being able to access any services.

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). 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.

The National Strategy will be updated for the period 2021-2027 and shall also include adoption of a contingency plan for the management of national borders and return. The National Contingency Plan will foresee, among others, (a) the indicators which will trigger its activation b) the necessary measures to be enforced in critical situations, both on a national, regional, and local level – staff reinforcement and equipment allocation, Joint activities, establishment of Command and Control Centers, as well as (c) the specific responsibilities and the level of involvement of each competent Authority.

In addition, the process for the development of a National Integrated Maritime Surveillance System is in progress. This is a project that ensures the information on the situation in the maritime field of responsibility of the Coast Guard in real time and on a 24-hour basis. It will actively contribute to the management of migratory flows and will maximize the effectiveness of measures to protect human life at sea. It should be emphasized, that the actions taken by the Greek authorities particularly at the sea borders are carried out in full compliance with the country's international obligations as provided for in the UNCLOS, the International Convention for Safety of Life at Sea and the International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue, and in accordance with European legislation.

The humanitarian commitment of the Hellenic Authorities has resulted in saving thousands of migrants' lives since 2015. This has been achieved within a particularly complex and volatile operational environment with intended misleading information emanating in most cases by the

smugglers networks and by those supporting them.

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 and free 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 and even without possessing all required documentation, whereas the enrollment to schools of irregularly migrant children must be always facilitated. The Greek Ministry of Migration & Asylum and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) have signed a MoU for the realization of the "All children in Education initiative for refugee and migrant children in Greece 2021-2024", aiming to facilitate smooth access to school and the continuous attendance of refugee and migrant children.

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 has been strengthened through the implementation of a relevant programme funded by the European Social Fund. Services include language courses, actions to promote migrants' access to the labour market and facilitate networking. It is worth mentioning that specific guidelines for the protection against COVID-19, translated in six (6) languages have been forwarded to the MICs, so as to reach the migrant communities.

Noteworthy that, to ensure that all migrants have access to vaccination against COVID-19, it was foreseen that anyone, regardless of residence status, can apply for a temporary social security number, as well as the possibility for migrants and refugees to receive a digital vaccination certificate.

Objective 16. Empower migrants and societies to realize full inclusion and social cohesion.

At institutional level, a Deputy Minister in charge of integration, as well as unaccompanied minors, has been appointed in the Ministry for Migration & Asylum, thus indicating the priority accorded to this policy area.

A new, holistic and coherent Integrated Action Programme for the Social Integration of migrants and beneficiaries of international protection in Greece, for the period 2021-2027 is being developed, with technical support by the International Organization for Migration. In November 2021 the National Strategy for Social Integration was published, covering also the integration of applicants and beneficiaries of international protection. The strategy is being implemented through various programs and actions, at national and local level, aiming at partnership-based social integration. They combine –among others– vocational training, job counseling, traineeship, skills certification etc. with a view to reduce inequalities between natives and third-country nationals.

To further promote migrants' integration, a number of actions and programmes are being implemented or planned, such as, for example, the training of intercultural mediators and their placement in Community Centres and Migrant Integration Centres, the initiative to offer “intercultural tours” by migrants and refugees to museums and archaeological sites of Athens, as well as a sensitization and awareness-raising campaign addressed to the receiving society on issues of migration and integration. Furthermore, the so-called “second chance” schools, that were initially established for native Greeks who have dropped out of school and who later wish to complete it, are now also open to all categories of migrant students.

Through targeted actions, supported by EU funds, the active participation of migrants in local administration is also promoted, as well as the empowerment of migrant women with the assistance of integration networks at local level.

Objective 21. Cooperate in facilitating safe and dignified return and readmission, as well as sustainable reintegration.

An 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. 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 mutual understanding of priorities and challenges

and a more-for-more approach, in line with the principle of conditionality and promote sustainable reintegration of returnees. In Greece, emphasis is placed on strengthening programmes of Assisted Voluntary Return & Reintegration, already implemented in cooperation with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and through harmonization of financial incentives for voluntary returns at European level, aiming at their orderly and humane return and reintegration in their countries of origin.

Greece makes intensive efforts to that direction, through its initiatives at EU level, as well as through bilateral discussions with selected origin countries. In this respect, the Memorandum of Understanding on Migration and Mobility signed between Greece and Bangladesh in February 2022, as mentioned previously under Objective 2, is expected to improve bilateral cooperation also in the area of returns, through the effective implementation of the "EU-Bangladesh Standard Operating Procedures for the Identification and Return of Persons without an Authorisation to Stay". As already mentioned, similar discussions have taken place at bilateral level with Pakistan. However, in some cases, existing agreements with origin and transit countries do not produce the expected results, thus undermining the fulfillment of GCM objectives and indicating that more efforts are needed to that direction.
