

Asylum and migration

Improving conditions for asylum seekers and irregular migrants in Greece, especially unaccompanied children, is an important priority for Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway. A total of €20.9 million from the EEA Grants has been allocated to an asylum programme in Greece to help establish an efficient national migration management system.

WHY FOCUS ON ASYLUM AND MIGRATION IN GREECE?

Greece has been a gateway to Europe for thousands of migrants for many years. Many use the country as a springboard to enter the borderless Schengen area. However serious shortcomings in the asylum and migration system poses an enormous challenge. The few structures that do exist are coming under huge strain with the unprecedented flows of migrants and asylum seekers currently arriving.

- > In 2014, around 45 500 irregular migrants were registered, arriving mostly in the Greek islands from the Turkish mainland. This represents an increase of 280% compared with the previous year. Of those, only 9 432 applied for asylum.
- > Most of migrants come from Syria, followed by Afghanistan, Somalia and Eritrea.

WHAT WILL WE ACHIEVE?

The three donor countries have set aside €20.9 million from the EEA Grants to help establish a well-functioning migration and asylum system in Greece and alleviate the migrant crisis. This will ensure that an asylum seeker is afforded his or her rights according to international and European law at all stages of an asylum application – registration; application; interview; reception facilities; determination of the application; and the right to stay in Greece or the obligation to return to his/her country of origin. Special attention is given to the situation of unaccompanied minors.



Photo: Yannis Kontos

HOW WILL WE ACHIEVE IT?

Support is focused on:

- > Establishment and running of the first ever screening centre at Evros on the mainland border with Turkey in northern Greece. An additional reception centre, due to open later in 2015, is being set up on the island of Lesbos. The centre will offer temporary accommodation, medical care, food and hygiene kits, interpretation services and legal counselling, and provide asylum seekers and irregular migrants with clear, factual information on their rights during the registration process. 2 700 irregular migrants benefitted from these services at the Evros centre in 2014.
- > Development and running of the new asylum administration service in Greece. Support includes funding for translation services and information materials, medical and psychosocial support and additional staff for processing asylum claims.
- > Three open reception centres (80 places) earmarked for unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors who have not initially applied for protection will be opened later in 2015.
- > Increasing the capacity of reception centres run by NGOs. Reception places for 274 people from vulnerable groups, in particular unaccompanied minors, are now available. In 2014, 870 people (640 unaccompanied children and 230 other vulnerable asylum seekers) were given accommodation in the centres. This corresponds to around one third of the total number of open reception places in Greece.
- > Setting up mobile teams to support and register newly arrived migrants on the Greek islands



Photo: IOM

International collaboration is also an important element, with two intergovernmental organisations involved in the implementation of a number of projects under the programme:

- > The International Organization for Migration (IOM) is providing assisted voluntary returns for asylum seekers not granted a residence permit. In total, 874 migrants were ensured safe return to their countries of origin as a result of this project.
- > The UN's Refugee Agency (UNHCR) is assisting the Greek authorities with the implementation of the country's national asylum and migration action plan.

BILATERAL COOPERATION

The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) is cooperating closely with the asylum authorities in Greece, sharing its experience and expertise on the implementation and follow-up of various projects. UDI is also working closely with the IOM and the UNHCR, who manage projects and provide technical expertise.

UDI has organised several seminars jointly with the Norwegian Embassy in Greece for local and regional

With funding from the Grants, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Greece has facilitated a dignified and safe return of more than 850 persons back to their home country.


The individuals participating in the voluntary return project were supported with a ticket and assisted with practical issues, such as the issuing of travel documents.

authorities. The first took place in Thessaloniki in May 2013 and has been followed by a number of similar events providing a platform for exchanging views and experience. Topics discussed have included establishing reception centres in local communities, guardianship for unaccompanied minors and on the identification of vulnerable groups of asylum seekers.


In addition, several of the supported projects have fostered bilateral co-operation between NGOs and public authorities in Greece and Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway.

ABOUT THE EEA AND NORWAY GRANTS

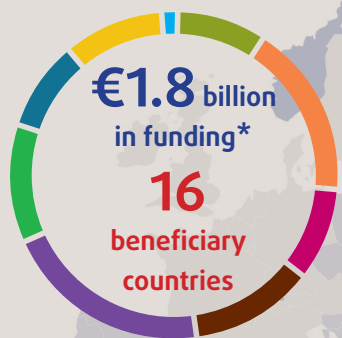
Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway provide funding to:



reduce disparities in Europe



strengthen bilateral relations



- AREAS OF SUPPORT**
- Environmental management
 - Climate change
 - Civil society
 - Cultural heritage and diversity
 - Human and social development
 - Green industry innovation
 - Justice and home affairs
 - Research and scholarships
 - Decent work and social dialogue

* EEA Grants €993.5 million (Norway 95.8%, Iceland 3.0%, Liechtenstein 1.2%) – Norway Grants €804.6 million, financed by Norway alone