

# Migration policies and practices in Greece 2011-2018

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Map of the RICs and Camps in Greece, until September 2018. Source: ASB, DRC, IOM, UNHCR (2018) Greece, Site Profiles, August-September 2018. [online] Available at: <https://bit.ly/2PyOOdH>

## Abstract

This poster highlights some of the main findings of the research conducted in Greece (with a special focus on Lesbos island) in the framework of RESPOND program, on refugee protection, reception, integration, as well as border policies, practices and experiences. An important research outcome is that there are serious concerns regarding the respect of the right for international protection (pushbacks, arrests, detention) and legal and social rights of asylum seekers and refugees.

## References

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## Introduction

Since the 1990s, Greece has adopted a very strict legal framework on migration and asylum, while the formulation and implementation of integration policies have been limited or absent. In 2015, 856,723 people arrived by sea to the Eastern Aegean islands (41,038 sea arrivals in 2014), accounting for 80% of total arrivals in Europe. More than half were Syrians, 20% were Afghans and 7% Iraqis. Since 2016, the number of asylum seekers in Greece has been increased and many of them remain particularly on islands or other border areas.

## Main Results

The introduction and the implementation of the Hotspot Approach and the EU-Turkey Statement (March 2016) combined with the increased border surveillance (with FRONTEX and NATO) contribute to a re-territorialisation of space and borders, by creating buffer zones in Greece.

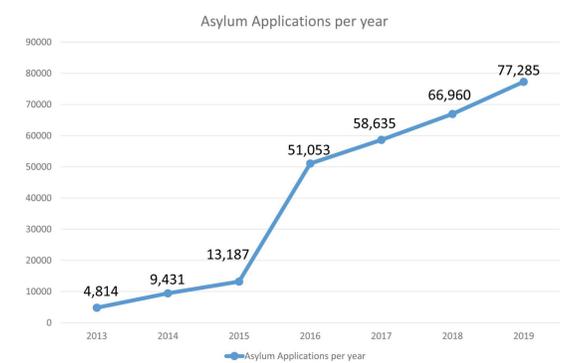
These policies and practices resulted, among others, in the **mass containment** of asylum seekers in the RICs on five Eastern Aegean islands, where they are subject to geographical restriction of movement. Along with the increase of asylum applications in Greece, asylum seekers are forced to live in the overcrowded Hotspots under suffocating conditions. Different asylum procedures are implemented on the islands (e.g. “Fast Track Border Procedure”) with some exceptions mainly for the most vulnerable. Vulnerability, constitutes a criterion of special treatment in the asylum procedure along with other factors (e.g. high VS low recognition rates).

The reception system for asylum seekers is implemented through the accommodation in the RICs, in mainland camps, and apartments in urban space – of which the former two are characterized by **spatial segregation and isolation**.

Integration is characterized by the absence of long-term planned and comprehensive policies, while health care provisions and access to the labour market for asylum seekers have been limited by recent legal amendments. The recent integration program “HELIOS” cannot cover the increased needs and results to mass homelessness.

## Methods and Material

- Document analysis of legal and policy documents
- 34 semi-structured interviews with refugees arrived between 2011 and 2017, including 1 focus-group interview, the majority of which were Afghans and Syrians.
- 15 semi-structured interviews, 1 round-table discussion, and online communication with stakeholders.
- Field sites: Lesbos and Athens.
- Qualitative content analysis based on a joint RESPOND coding scheme.



Asylum applications per year in Greece. Source: Greek Asylum Service (2020) Asylum Service Statistics (from 07.06.2013 to 29.02.2020) [online] Available at: <https://bit.ly/2St5x3Q>

## Lessons Learned

- The current state of the asylum and reception system in Greece is highly problematic. The EU-Turkey Statement, the EU “Hotspot Approach” and the geographical restriction on the Eastern Aegean islands must be effectively terminated.
- The RICs should be decongested and asylum seekers should be transferred to the mainland or relocated to the EU.
- There is a need for the acceleration of asylum procedures in Greece.
- A significant improvement of conditions and services, is needed, but not in the current form of isolated camps or Hotspots.
- A long-term integration policy is urgent to be implemented, addressed to all asylum seekers and refugees.



## Get in touch

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