

Stop sending asylum seekers to Greece

Brussels, 29 October 2010. In a letter to EU governments, ECRE and its member organisations across Europe call on EU countries to follow the example of Belgium, the UK, Iceland and Norway, which have stopped sending asylum seekers to Greece and are examining the cases nationally.

“Frontex, the EU Borders Agency, [will send border guards to help Greece](#) to stop migrants from entering across the land border with Turkey. Paradoxically, at the same time, most Member States investing resources and personnel in Frontex operations keep on putting more pressure on the Greek system by sending asylum seekers there. European countries need to be serious about EU solidarity”, said Bjarte Vandvik, ECRE’s Secretary General.

The rights of refugees are violated in Greece: the evidence

In Greece, most people in need of international protection do not even have the opportunity to have their asylum claims heard. There are in Greece now more than 52,000 asylum cases to be examined. At the main asylum applications centre in the country, in Athens, only around 20 applications are accepted every week.

For those few who actually manage to apply for asylum in Greece, there’s no chance of being recognised as a refugee. Virtually no asylum seekers (0.3%) were granted international protection in Greece in 2009. For instance, while no Iraqi was recognised as a refugee in Greece, 77% of Iraqi asylum seekers were granted international protection in Germany.

The overwhelming evidence about the dysfunctional asylum system in Greece is starting to have consequences on European Governments’ policies. **Belgium** (as of 10 October 2010), **Norway** (on 15 October 2010), the **UK** (on 17 September 2010), and **Iceland** (14 October 2010) have already stopped sending asylum seekers to Greece. They have decided to examine these claims substantively in their own countries. The **Netherlands** is suspending transfers for those who challenge the decision to go to Greece (since 6 October 2010).

The [European Court of Human Rights has also stated](#) that all transfers will be temporarily suspended in any case where an asylum seeker challenges his or her return to Greece.

Only last week, the [UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Manfred Nowak](#), reported on the enormous difficulties to gain access to the asylum procedure in Greece as well as the poor conditions faced by migrants and refugees in detention. As a conclusion to these findings, the UN has also called on the EU to stop transfers of asylum seekers to Greece and to renegotiate the Dublin II Regulation. This follows a similar call from Thomas Hammarberg, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, to stop all transfers to Greece due to the extremely harsh conditions asylum seekers face there.

The Dublin system needs to be changed – The opportunity is here

The European Commission, EU governments and the European Parliament are currently discussing how to reform the Dublin system. ECRE has called for a complete revision of the Dublin Regulation, which currently allows refugees to be sent back to countries that do not provide sufficient protection. As a first step in the right direction, ECRE supports the establishment of a mechanism to suspend transfers of asylum seekers to states that cannot guarantee a full and fair examination of their claims or proper reception standards. Suspension should also be accompanied by supporting measures that seek to rectify the asylum situation in a Member State. Currently, only a few states have stopped transfers to Greece. A European suspension mechanism would compel all Member States to share responsibility and act coherently.

According to the Dublin Regulation, as a general rule, the first EU Member State that an asylum seeker enters should be the one to examine the asylum application. It has become clear that the Dublin system is failing both Member States and people in need of international protection. It creates more pressure on European States located at the EU borders and it fails to protect the rights of asylum seekers because it does not take account of the fact that a

person's chance of being recognised as a refugee varies widely from one EU country to another.

Further information

- For further information on the Dublin Regulation, see ECRE, *Sharing Responsibility for Refugee Protection in Europe: Dublin Reconsidered*, available at http://www.ecre.org/resources/policy_papers/1058 and ECRE, *Comments on the European Commission Proposal to recast the Dublin Regulation*, available at: http://www.ecre.org/resources/policy_papers/1342

- ECRE supports **Greece's recent efforts to reform their asylum system**. For further information on the Greek Action Plan on Asylum and Migration Management, see: http://www.ydt.gr/index.php?option=ozo_content&lang=EN&perform=view&id=3246&Itemid=443

- The **European Council on Refugees and Exiles** (ECRE) is a network of 68 refugee-assisting organisations in 30 European countries, working together to protect and respect refugees. www.ecre.org

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