

New emergencies in the refugee situation in Greece:

**Policies and practices in the face of
increasingly difficult challenges**

The presentation aims at providing the main components of the current refugee situation in Greece :

- a. Against the background
- b. In the framework of the Mediterranean situation (arrivals) since 2015, comparative figures
- c. Recent trends in 2019 and new challenges
- d. Practices and policies: an overview of the current developments and constraints in the shadow of the European policies

The state of play in the refugee situation in Greece

Actual refugee population in Greece, almost 104,000*

- ❖ a/s stranded in the Aegean islands in dear and overcrowded conditions (35,400)**
- ❖ a/s in the mainland (68,100) mainly in 28 provisional camps where only basic needs are met and/or under another accommodation scheme
- ❖ 58,321 asylum applications during 2019: in total 234,978 since the closure of the borders in February 2016

Most critical issues

2019: sharp increase in the sea arrivals

- As of the end of October, **45,100** persons arrived at the Greek shores against 27,500 during the same period last year; an increase 61%
- Since January 2019, over 2,600 unaccompanied boys and girls have made the journey to Greece, an 82 % increase since 2018
- The reception places in the islands (hot spots) have long surpassed their capacity with **35,400** people in and around the sites staying under precarious conditions risking their well being.

Most critical issues

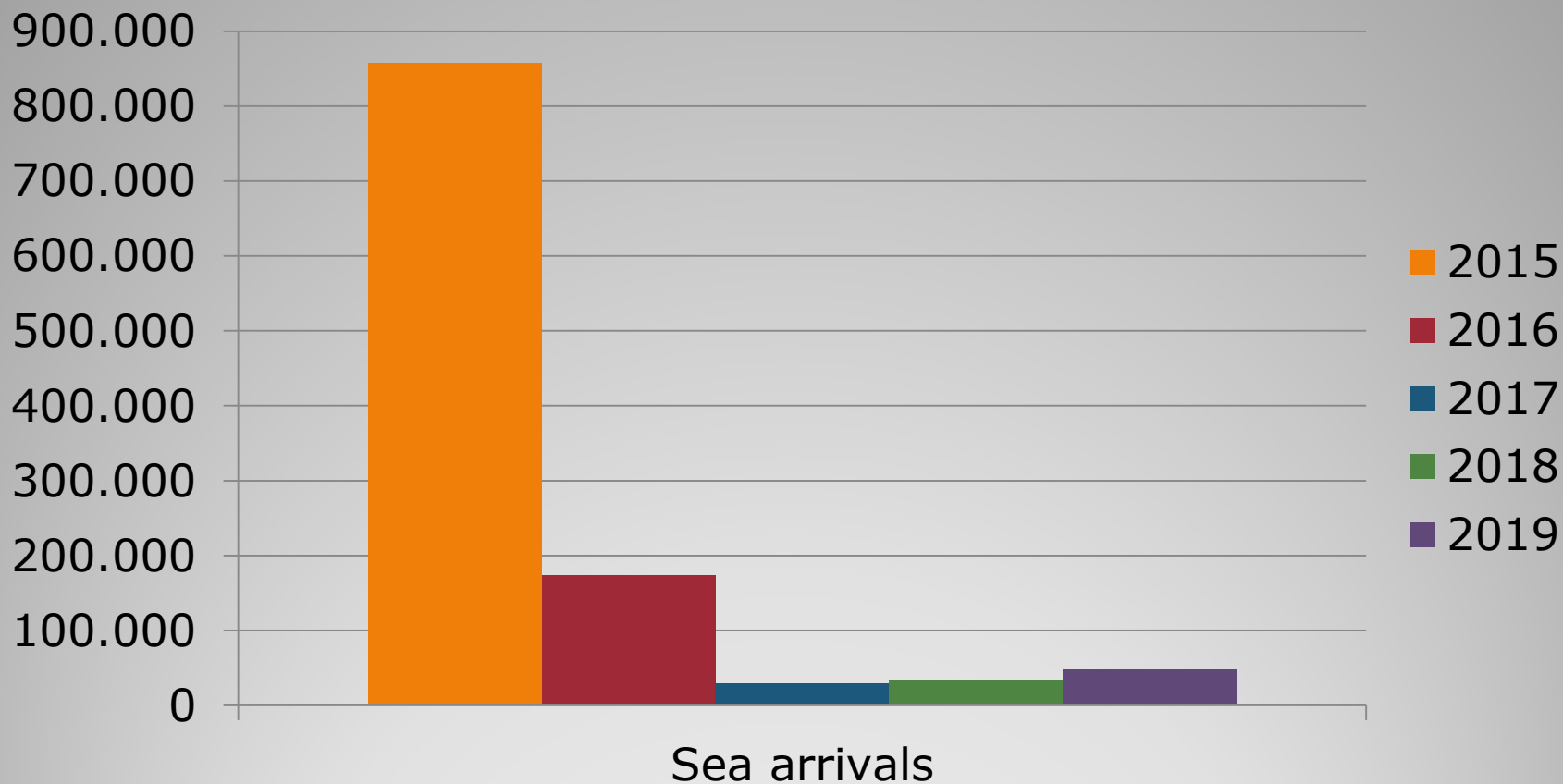
- ❑ Hot spots approach, need to step up the transfers from the islands to the mainland, improve the reception conditions at the entry points
- ❑ Need for creation of new accommodation facilities in the mainland
- ❑ Protection of 5000 UASC
- ❑ Serious gaps of the asylum procedure, including lack of access for registration of the claim, need for legal aid, efficient processing of the application
- ❑ Need for a national strategy on integration

Most critical issues

The background:

- The peak of the refugee arrivals, January 2015 to March 2016: 1.005.579 arrivals in Greece by sea.
- Over the last 5 years, Greece has had to deal cumulatively with two of the most serious crises in the recent history of the country: the huge migratory flows (proportionally with the size of the country and the reception capacity) at the Eastern and South-Eastern sea borders and the socio-economic crisis. This last one, under the tremendous pressure of the memorandum policies, has negatively affected the operational capacity of Greek administration to respond effectively to the management of the migratory flows including the reception and protection needs of new arrivals
- With the closure of the border in Eidomeni in February 2016 and definitively in March with the imposition of the EU-Turkey agreement on 20 March 2016, the "burden" was transferred to the islands. In this context, the large majority found themselves confined to one of the five islands where hotspots are located for periods ranging from some months to –very often- more than a year, in overcrowded and appalling facilities. As the number of arrivals has increased, the already dire conditions have deteriorated and the number of transfers to the mainland remains insufficient to address the crisis.

The "refugee crisis", 2015-2016



Sea arrivals in Greece, during 2019, are 64% higher than 2018 totals from this time

- Eidomeni: winter 2016



**The end of the Balkan route and the
containment in the Greek hot spots**

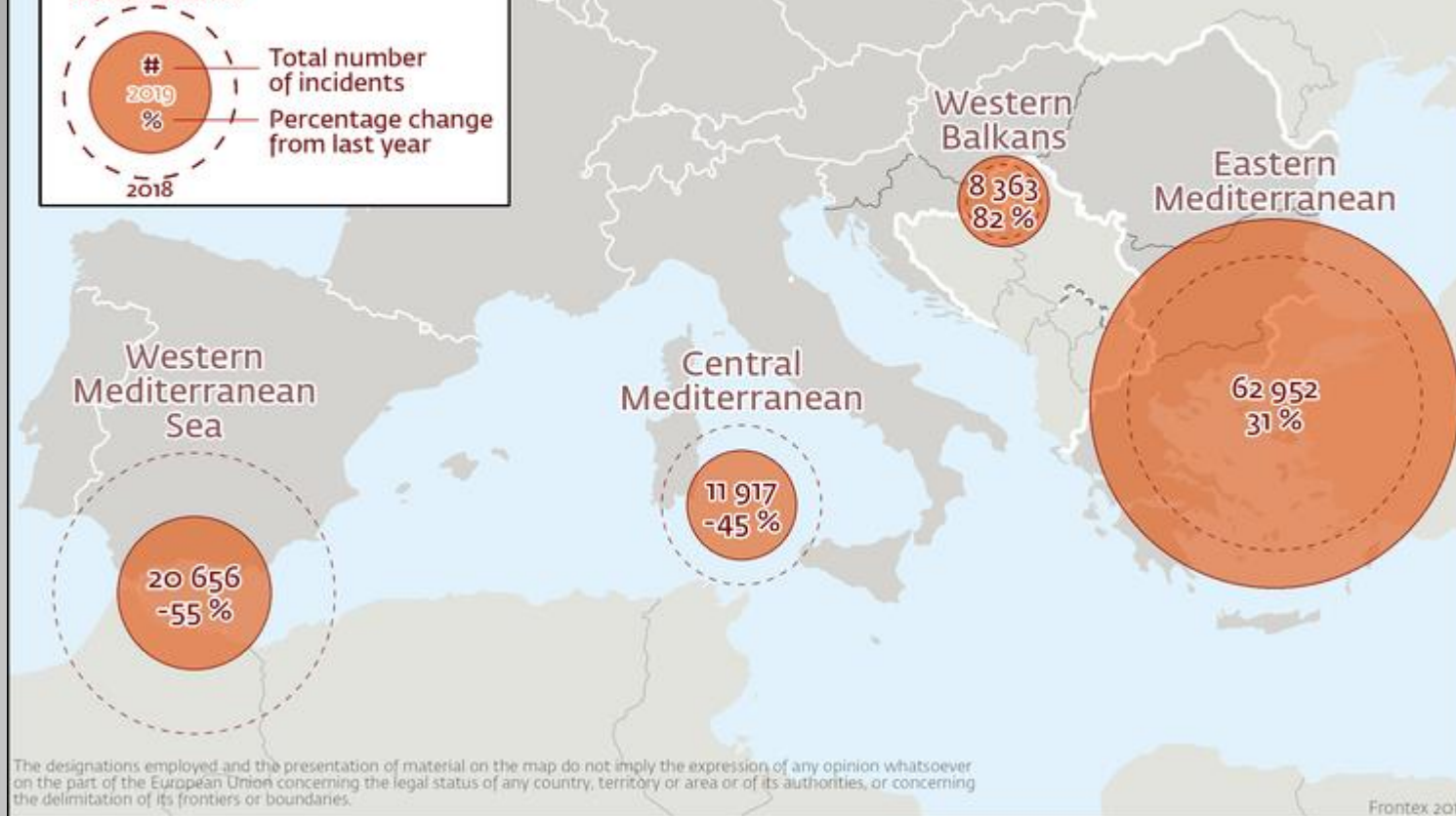
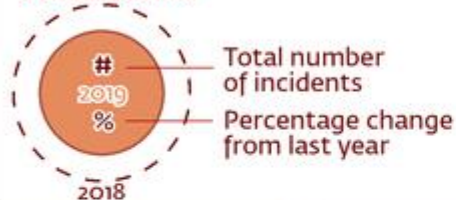
Between 1 January and 13 November 2019, some 100,776* refugees and migrants arrived via the three Mediterranean routes from North Africa and Turkey. Most crossed the Eastern Mediterranean from Turkey. Out of these arrivals by sea and land, **Greece has received more than a half**, 59,433 persons (47,083 sea arrivals and 12,350 land arrivals).

Greece's new emergencies in the context of the Mediterranean situation

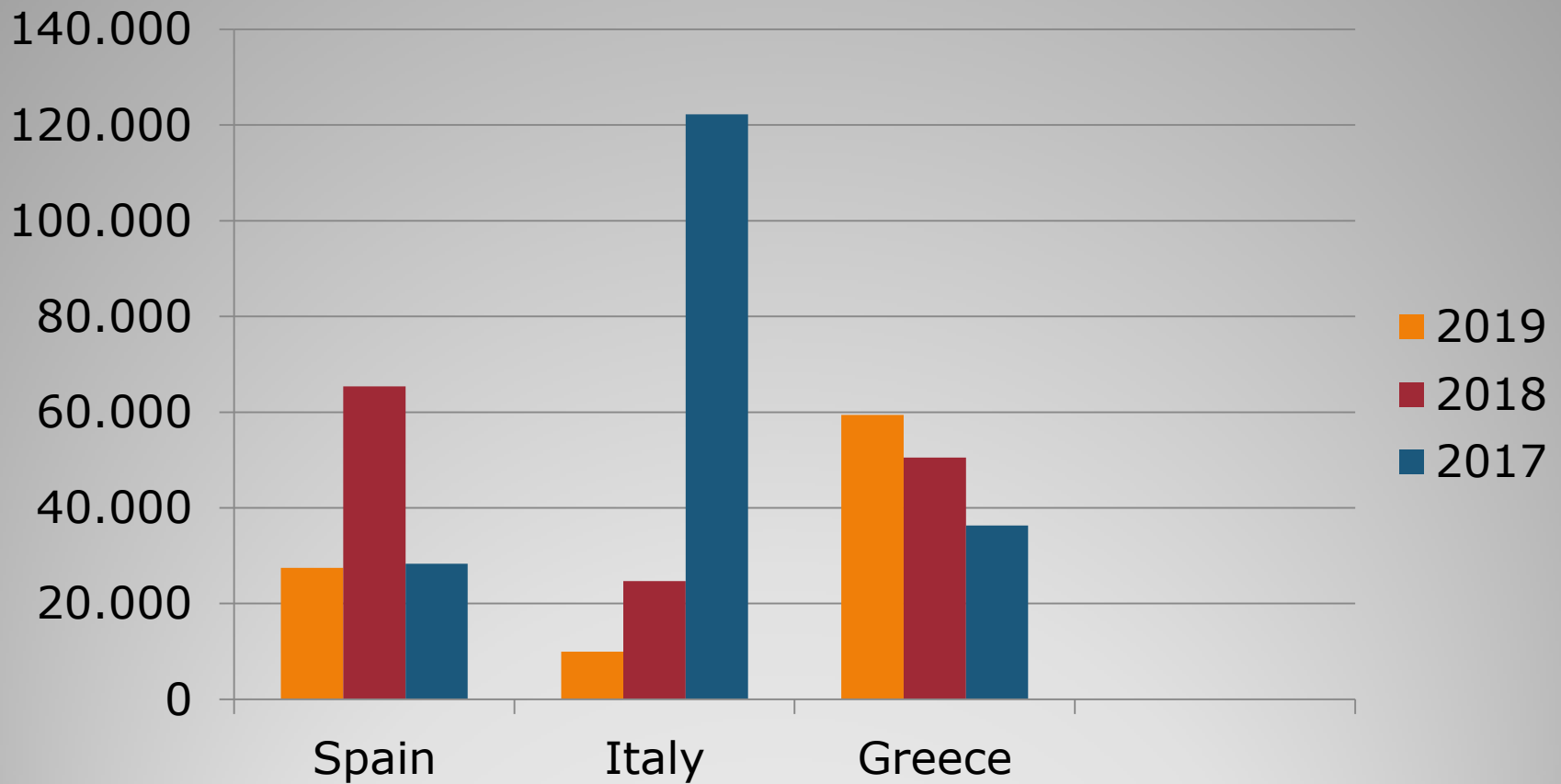
NUMBER OF ILLEGAL BORDER-CROSSINGS

Jan - Oct 2018 / 2019

Route Name

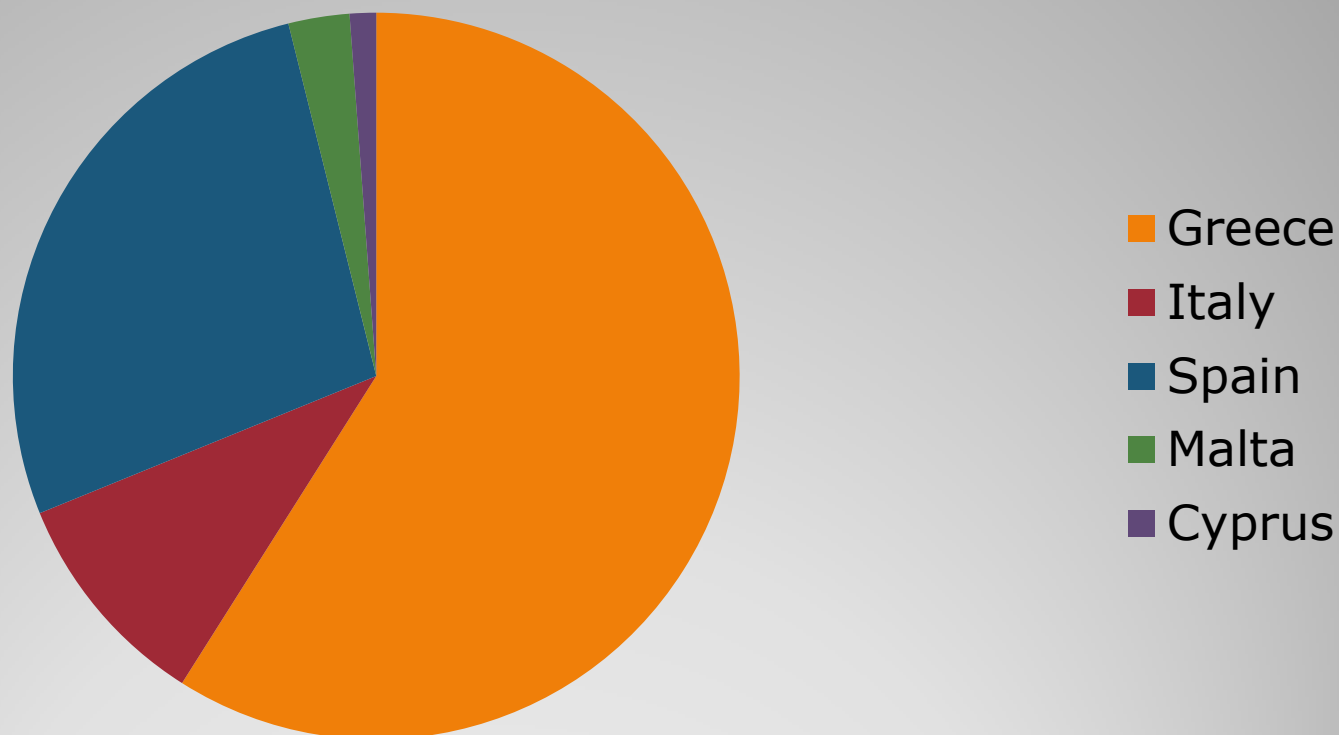


Frontex New Release: Migratory situation in Mediterranean, October 2019



Total arrivals, 2017-2019, Spain, Italy, Greece

total arrivals



Total arrivals Eastern Med route, Jan-13/November 2019:100,776; arrivals in Greece account for 59%

Sea arrivals, being rescued from a shipwreck



- Arrivals, getting safe on the shores



In 2019, 70 people lost their lives or are considered missing at sea in their attempt to reach Greece

- The majority of new arrivals in 2019 are from Afghanistan (16,861/37%), Syria (12,452/28%), the Democratic Republic of Congo (3,293/7%) and Iraq (3,004/7%). Similar to last year, the majority of arrivals from Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq arrived in family groups.
- More than half of the population are women (23%) and children (36%), while 41% are men.
- One-third of arrivals in 2019 are children including unaccompanied ones. Of those, more than 6 out of 10 are below the age of 12. Lesbos received the majority (43%) of all new arrivals, during 2019, followed by the Dodecanese islands (25%), Samos (18%) and Chios (14%).

Demographics of the sea arrivals

All reception centres are heavily overpopulated, especially Samos (6,000 vs 700) and Lesbos (14,400 vs 2,150). In smaller islands, such as Kastelorizo, Kalymnos and Symi there are no reception structures leaving asylum-seekers exposed to risks. Thousands stay in rickety tents with inadequate access to sanitation. The current situation in the islands **comes as a result not only of the rising in arrivals during the last months of 2019 but is mainly a part of the legacy of the containment policies under the EU Turkey deal.**

The Greek hot spots, Nov 2019



Samos, Vathi Nov 2019

Delays in medical and psychosocial screening in the reception centres due to staffing shortages overburden the timely completion of the vulnerability screening – an integral part of the asylum procedure. This may pose a risk for the submission of applications for family reunification under Dublin Regulation.

The Greek hot spots, Nov 2019

❑ **Refugee and Migrant children trapped inside the camps: A lost generation?**

Christos Christou, International President MSF, Samos, Nov 2019, interview Euronews,

- «What shocks me most is the little children. As you can imagine, I've been in various crisis areas around the world, I've been in war zones, in devastating situations and always little kids were the most difficult part of the story, . Their look [in the Greek camps] is a look of despair, of fear. They've lost their appetite to live, their desire to play and I feel that we have stolen their childhood from them.”

<https://www.euronews.com/2019/11/21/greek-plan-to-move-migrants-won-t-end-inhumane-conditions-aid-group>

❑ **Greece must urgently transfer a/s from the Aegean islands and improve living conditions in reception facilities**

Dunja Mijatovic, Commissioner for Human Rights, 31/1/2019

- "The situation of migrants, including a/s, in the Greek islands has dramatically worsened over the past 12 months...It is an explosive situation. There is a desperate lack of medical care and sanitation in the vastly overcrowded camps. This no longer has anything to do with the reception of a/s. This has become a struggle for survival”

**Institutional and civil society key actors
report from the Greek islands**

In the mainland:

- From 28 October until 24 November, **4,466** vulnerable a/s have been transferred to the mainland by the authorities
- Current reception places country-wide are full, as a result of continuous arrivals as well as limited legal movement out of Greece for asylum-seekers and refugees. The **30,700** people, mostly women and children, in and around the reception centres often have few options but to stay under precarious conditions putting at risk their well-being.

Transfers & crisis in the accommodation scheme

Camps in the mainland:

- ❑ The situation in mainland sites is overall better, but the expedited transfers have tested the ability of certain camps to receive more people. Tensions between asylum-seekers and also locals have become more apparent fueled by exasperation and harsh living conditions.
- ❑ The host population under *Estia* program run by UNHCR, benefits from the 4,480 apartments and 14 buildings that the program rents in **21 cities** and towns across Greece. UNHCR has 25,550 accommodation places in October.

Estia program & crisis in the accommodation scheme

- There are 5,000 unaccompanied children in Greece, of which 1,250 in shelters and supported independent living appropriate for their age (EKKA data). However, the 1,600 boys and girls in the reception centres face woefully inadequate conditions and often have to share their space with adults or sleep out in the open risking exploitation and abuse. Another 234 minors are placed in *Protective Custody* (detention). Their transfer to a shelter suitable for their needs is lengthy adding to the hardship of fleeing conflict and prosecution.
- During the last 4 months, the European Court of Human Rights issued 6 decisions under the interim measures and obliged Greece to release immediately the minors from the “protective custody” and accommodate them in conditions that are not violating art. 3 ECHR
- According to a PM statement last Friday (22/11) other EU states have not accepted to relocate around 3,000 unaccompanied minors from Greece to their respective countries.

Unaccompanied minors

- The refugee crisis in 2015 and 2016 has transformed the local societies, that have been socialized through the experience of the human tragedy in front of their eyes, in host and hospitality societies, in tolerant and supportive societies and started to demonstrate compassion and solidarity.
- During the last months, there is a growing tension within local societies, where some parts of the population show an ever-widening pool of resentment towards the provisional accommodation of asylum seekers in open camps, on the periphery of urban areas

Increasing tensions within the local societies

New policies (*a new robust policy*)*

- ❑ A new harsh law*, with a view to rapid return to Turkey or to countries of origin. The law limits rights and removes procedural safeguards.
- ❑ The Greek government has now announced plans for large scale detention of asylum-seekers in the country
- ❑ Priority on unaccompanied minors: on Sunday (24/11) the Prime Minister announced the creation of a program called "No Child Alone" aimed at placing some 4,000 refugee, migrant children currently living at island camps to more civilized conditions, as well as legal aid to help reunite them with relatives who have traveled on to other European countries.
- ❑ The Government criticized other EU member-states for failing to display solidarity in tackling the migration problem. Since the last 3-4 months the Prime Minister as well as other governmental officials are trying hard to clearly underline the need for burden sharing mechanisms that should be taken from other MS as a matter of emergency in order to support Greece (family reunification and relocation measures).

Responses, announced policies



Church leaders show compassion



Bishop Nektarios of Argolida (Peloponese) is visiting refugees who just arrived in the town of Ligourio and are accommodated in hotels of the region



Bishop Ignatius of Dimitriadis & Almyra takes a position on the issue of the settlement of refugees in Greece

Bishop Ignatius of Dimitriadou & Almirou,

President of the Synodical Committee on Inter Orthodox and Inter Christian Relations

"I cannot accept anyone who refuses to offer to refugees and immigrants. For me, he is neither Greek nor Orthodox. Orthodoxy cares for any person no matter where they come from. This is what Christ means. As long as we preach Christ this is what we will do it," he said in an interview to Alpha radio.

"To those voices claiming that "Muslim refugees and migrants threaten Christianity," Metropolitan Ignatius recalled that Greeks did not lose their Christian faith during the 400 years of the Ottoman occupation and will not lose it now.

"I too am concerned, but in the name of anxiety you cannot leave a child hungry. We were not lost during 400 years of slavery, will we be lost now? Now too we will endure. Europe is in danger of losing God," he stressed.

Church leaders are responding

"Greece today is under a blackmail by Turkey where when she wants, she opens the gates and sends refugees and migrants". As a Church we cannot but help the helpless man, but we have the requirement to tell us exactly where our borders are and whether all states are obliged to guard the borders." **He also wondered why refugees find barriers and cannot leave Greece and whether Europe has become what its creators wanted.**

The Archbishop Ieronymos II of Athens and all Greece comments on the current refugee crisis

“ Successful integration involves multiple factors, all strongly interconnected. Extended legal uncertainty, being separated from family members, unstable housing conditions, language difficulties, interrupted social support, mental health issues, limited educational and training opportunities, and the threat of criminality – these all in and of themselves present hurdles to inclusion, and can also exacerbate each other”.

Michael O’Flaherty

FRA new report on the integration of young refugees, Vienna 19/11/2019

The missing components of a refugee integration process

Thank you

**Efthalia Pappa, CCME ExCom member
Athens, 26/11/2019, Eurodiaconia & Apostoli
workshop**