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2.3 EU-Turkey Statement

To address migratory pressure on the Eastern Mediterranean route, the EU and Turkey concluded the EU-Turkey Statement in March 2016,[142] with a three-fold aim to:

> End irregular migration flows from Turkey to the EU;
> Enhance reception conditions for refugees in Turkey; and
> Offer safe and legal pathways for Syrian refugees from Turkey to the EU.

To achieve these ends, one of the provisions requires that all new irregular migrants crossing from Turkey into the Greek islands would be returned to Turkey. In addition, a resettlement scheme stipulates that for every Syrian returned to Turkey from the Greek islands, another Syrian would be resettled from Turkey to the EU, taking into account the UN Vulnerability Criteria. The statement also specifies that Turkey would take necessary measures to prevent the emergence of new sea or land routes for illegal migration from Turkey to the EU, in cooperation with neighbouring states and the EU.

In March 2020, the European Commission published a report, taking stock of the cumulative results of the statement after four years of implementation. As a result of the agreement, irregular arrivals from Turkey to the EU were 94 % lower than before its implementation. The number of deaths in the Aegean Sea also decreased from 1 175 in the 20 months prior to the implementation of the statement to 439 since the statement became operational.[143] This indicates, however, that in relative terms the crossing became increasingly dangerous for those attempting it.

The resettlement of Syrian refugees under the statement continued in 2019, with a cumulative total of about 27 000 who were resettled from Turkey to an EU Member State by March 2020. To help refugees and host communities in Turkey, a total of EUR 6 billion has been allocated through the Facility for Refugees for the period 2016-2025, focusing on humanitarian assistance, education, health, municipal infrastructure and socio-economic support. These funds are used to increase school attendance among refugee children, offer catch-up and back-up educational support, construct new schools, provide health consultations and vaccines for infants, and provide support for basic needs of approximately 1.7 million refugees.[144]

More progress is needed in implementing returns from the Greek islands to Turkey. The pace has been slow with only 2 735 returns concluded since the agreement came into force. Another 4 030 migrants have returned voluntarily from the islands since June 2016, supported by the Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Programme (AVRR).[145]

142 European Council. (2016, March 18). EU-Turkey statement, 18 March 2016. http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18/eu-turkey-statement/

143 European Commission. (2020). EU-Turkey Statement: Four Years On. https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20200318_managing-migration-eu-turkey-statement-4-years-on_en.pdf

144 European Commission. (2020). EU-Turkey Statement: Four Years On. https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20200318_managing-migration-eu-turkey-statement-4-years-on_en.pdf

145 European Commission. (2020). EU-Turkey Statement: Four Years On. https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20200318_managing-migration-eu-turkey-statement-4-years-on_en.pdf

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