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# “...we share same thoughts, same fears, same hopes”

## Migrants' & Refugees' stories in Greece

Migration remains one of the most significant socio-economic issues for **Europe** and **Greece** in particular, that since the 90's has altered its migration profile from a sending to a receiving country, as well as a transit stop, especially for Eastern Europeans, Middle Easterners and Africans heading to other EU countries.

According to recent figures by the **Hellenic Statistic Authority** (Greek acronym: ELSTAT), Greece has a population of approximately **10,7 million**, while there are **615,924 immigrants** residing legally in the country, 75-80% of whom are believed to be economically active (March 2020, EURES/The European Job Mobility Portal). An estimated 68% of Greece's foreign population is Albanian, while the second largest group are Bulgarian nationals, followed by Romanians, Pakistanis and Georgians. Before the economic crisis, it has been estimated that there were over one million foreign immigrants working in Greece.

During the **2007-2015** period, various geo-political evolutions and especially conflicts and crisis in Syria led almost 3 million people to leave their home countries and search for a better future in countries of the European Union. According to **Frontex** approximately **1,8 million people** reached Europe through Greece. In the period **2015-2018** the total number of migrants and asylum seekers who came to Europe is approximately 2 million. In more detail, the total number of **arrivals in Greece** from Turkey was 847,084 during the entire 2015. Flows continued at a high rate during the first two months of 2016, with 147,000 people arriving but total flows for 2016 stood only at 173,561 showing a dramatic decrease after the implementation of the EU - Turkey Statement. The most common nationalities were Syrian, Pakistani, Iraqi, Afghanistan and Albanian.

Based on a **UNHCR** report published in February 2020, the refugees and migrants who arrived and have remained, so far, in Greece since the 2015-2016 flow are estimated **118,000** (76,000 in the mainland and 42,000 on the islands). Inevitably, the integration of various groups of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Greece follows different and most probably diverging paths.

The following migrants' and refugees' stories come from the website of the **International Organization for Migration/IOM** Office in Greece (<https://greece.iom.int/en/migrants-stories>), sending messages of hope, resilience and solidarity:

**Khaled Al Hamadi**, is a **20 years old Syrian** who lives in Greece three years now. He first arrived in Chios island, where he stayed for 5 months and then he was transferred to Andravida open accommodation facility. Members of his family are currently in Iraq and in Germany. “When I was in Syria I studied in high school and during my staying in Greece I studied in the Greek public school. I can speak English and Greek and one of my future plans is to study the German language as well”, he says. During his free time, apart from playing the guitar, he is organizing activities in which other children in the camp can take part. “Interacting with people inspires me and I wish someday to become a cultural mediator in an international organization that helps refugees and migrants all over the world. This is the reason I am investing in studying foreign languages. Everyone has a different personality, but sometimes we share same thoughts, same fears, same hopes. I strongly believe in communication between people, regardless nationality and religion. I want to say that I am optimist person who makes dreams for the future”.

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“When I was going to school back in Kabul, I was really enjoying the course of biology very much. Now, in my new school in Athens, close to Victoria square, I would like to focus on computer science. This is something I want also to follow as a professional”, says **M.S., a 17 years old boy from Afghanistan** who lives in Greece for almost three years. He is currently staying in an apartment in Athens with three friends, who also reached Greece alone, as unaccompanied migrant children. Two of them are from Afghanistan, one from Pakistan and one from Egypt. School has been a challenging experience for him, however as he admits, his teacher and schoolmates have been proved warm and helpful.

“If anyone told me a few years back that, right now, I would be looking for a job in tourism in a foreign country, as a refugee, I would laugh. But, that’s life, This is me and here I am”, says **Talha Mohamed, a mechanical engineer from Aleppo, Syria**. After investing time to learn good Greek with the support of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, he is in a position now to search for a job with the support of IOM HELIOS project staff. “Job counsellors provided me with directions since day one; we sat down together and did my CV at the Integration Learning Center in Thessaloniki which operates in collaboration with Greek Council for Refugees”.

**Marcel, Abdou, Ousmane and Daniel**, are all refugees who even though come from different countries in Africa, they now share the same roof in Thessaloniki and gradually organize their lives in Greece. All four were informed of the options provided by “HELIOS”, the IOM's integration program aimed at beneficiaries of international protection residing in Greece. "They gave us information about our choices. They informed us about home - search procedures, the need to learn Greek so that we can ease our daily lives and, of course, about the most important part of our integration; finding a job to support ourselves financially", Daniel explains.



- Hellenic Republic, Ministry of Migration and Asylums: A detailed guide in English for International Protection applicants is available [here](#), as well as in the [18 following languages](#).
- The International Organization for Migration (IOM) was founded in December 1951, operating as the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration (ICEM). Greece is a founding member of IOM and the Athens Mission operates on the basis of an Agreement of 17 April 1952, between the Greek Government and IOM (ICEM). IOM implements the “[Supporting the Greek Authorities in Managing the National Reception System for Asylum Seekers and Vulnerable Migrants \(SMS\)](#)” project, with the support of the European Commission, AMIF, DG HOME, EU Home Affairs and the “[HELIOS - Hellenic Integration Support for Beneficiaries of International Protection](#)” project, with the support of [DG HOME](#).
- Let's ensure the Coronavirus response protects the most vulnerable. We are in this together. IOM's Q&A's about COVID-19 in [Arabic](#), in [English](#), in [Farsi](#), in [French](#), in [Somali](#), in [Sorani](#), in [Urdu](#).
- The drawing on the cover page belongs to a Syrian asylum seeker who was relocated from Greece to Finland in 2016 and was published under his permission on a press release by the Hellenic Asylum Service. Source: <http://asylo.gov.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Μετεγκατάσταση-στη-Φινλανδία-31.10.2016.pdf>