

# **Agenda 2030: Leave no one behind**

## Migration as a component of Sustainable Development

**BACKGROUND PAPER**





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## MIGRATION & SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN GREECE.

The challenges facing societies increasingly transcend borders, calling for global approaches. To this end, in 2015 the United Nations General Assembly adopted the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as part of Agenda 2030. They aim to eliminate inequalities and substantially improve the lives of all people, with the central message being **“no one will be left behind”**.

Greece is significantly lagging behind in the implementation of the SDGs. In 2018, it ranked fourth from last amongst the 35 OECD countries and, although OECD countries on average had achieved 58% of the 17 targets over time, Greece had an implementation rate of 49%. It also records lower performance in terms of gender equality and education, while in the areas of poverty and health it is just below the OECD average. On the other hand, Greece’s performance in tackling hunger is better than the OECD average.<sup>1</sup>

Good performance in the process of achieving sustainable development goals requires good economic performance. Paradoxically, Greece’s overall performance in terms of SDGs (49%) is considerably higher than its performance in terms of Goal 8 (33%) which relates to the economy. However, as pointed out by the Hellenic Federation of Enterprises (SEV),<sup>2</sup> actions financed by loans are liable to have temporary results as regards the indicators and thus are subject to change. Therefore, for Greece, which has recently emerged from a prolonged economic recession - accompanied by a shrinking labour market, a loss of social structures and benefits, uncertainty, migration of young people in search of better economic conditions - achieving the sustainable development objectives by 2030 is becoming difficult, *“as solid economic foundations are lacking”*. Efforts to implement the SDGs have been set back by the pandemic<sup>3</sup> which threatens a sharp halt to the recovery of the Greek economy that had previously experienced growth in the order of 2%. The pandemic crisis risks exacerbating the long-term challenges facing Greece in the labour market. It is noted that while the employment rate has increased over the last six years, it is still among the lowest among the OECD countries, while wages remain low.

In conclusion, the chronic shortcomings in integration policies combined with the economic recession impeded the integration and participation on an equal footing of the refugee and migration population of the country in its economic and social life, as well as the harmonious coexistence of all social groups, thus weakening their dynamic contribution to sustainable development efforts. It seems that the pledge to **‘leave no one behind’ will not be realised in Greece easily**.

This background paper is based on [ActionAid’s monitoring report](#) which explores Greece’s steps towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) under the UN Agenda

1 SEV, Bulletin on Greek economy: “Sustainable growth for a strong economy!, p.1-2.

2 SEV, Bulletin on Greek economy: “Sustainable growth for a strong economy! (October, 2019, p.1-2).

3 OECD (2020), “Economic Survey of Greece 2020”.

2030. The report presents the main actions of the central government with the aim to integrating both refugees and migrants and explores the ways integration connects to SDGs. Finally, it includes a section with recommendations to the Greek authorities for a national strategy for the successful implementation of the SDGs.

## Greece faced with the challenge of 'leaving no one behind'.

### The arrival of refugees and migrants

Agenda 2030 recognizes and integrates migration as a core development consideration for the first time.<sup>4</sup> In other words, people with a migrant background are treated not only as a vulnerable group but also as agents of development. A direct reference to migration is made in target 10.7 of goal 10 on "reducing inequality within and among countries". In particular, target 10.7 calls for **"facilitating orderly, safe, smooth and responsible migration and mobility of people, through implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies"**.

Greece, [in its 2018 Voluntary National Review for the United Nations](#), the only one submitted by our country to date, affirmed its strong commitment to the implementation of Agenda 2030 and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. The priorities set were reducing social inequalities, combating unemployment - particularly for young people and women, making headway in gender equality **and promoting the social integration of migrant and other vulnerable groups**. Nevertheless, for a country that just came out of a protracted economic crisis and received large mixed refugee and migration flows, achieving the goals, albeit a top political priority, was not at all self-evident.

At their peak, total arrivals in 2015 numbered 861,630, falling to 74,613 in 2019.<sup>5</sup> According to a report by the Greek research institute diaNEOsis<sup>6</sup> presently "in Greece there are 579,736 settled ("legal") migrants from previous decades (mainly in urban centres, with residence permits - EU figures for 01/01/2017), while estimates of the exact number of refugees/migrants in Greece as a result of the 2015-16 crisis vary, but range from 50,000-70,000. In 2018 the asylum application backlog reached 66,965 cases."<sup>7</sup>

Initially the European Union did not step up to the mark in terms of providing effective assistance in the management of migrant/refugee arrivals, and instead of setting up a fixed mechanism for sharing responsibility between Member States, it opted to shift the problem to Member States located at its external borders, under pressure from countries that were hostile to the migration/refugee issue. At the same time, relocations from Greece were extremely slow. Since then, the European Union has supported Greece by activating financing schemes.

4 IOM, "Migration and the 2030 Agenda: A Guide for practitioners", p. 13- 14

5 UN High Commission for Refugees.

6 Dianeosis, "A comparative analysis of the integration of migrants and refugees in Greece. Personal Experiences, Best Practices, Policy Proposals", p. 33

7 Ministry of Migration & Asylum, Statistics on Asylum Service (from 07.06.2013 to 29.02.2020).



Despite the drop in arrivals after 2016, the fallout of the 2015-16 crisis can still be felt. When refugees and migrants arrive in Greece, they are in a wretched state, having experienced extreme conditions (violence, bombing, destruction of their homes, etc.), which makes it necessary to provide support immediately after their arrival.<sup>8</sup> However, timely and effective care provision is hampered by a lack of resources and poor conditions in reception centres, **a fact which undermines the fulfilment of SDG 3 on “ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages”.**

The hotspots approach taken by the European Union in Greece and Italy has proved ineffective, as reception centres are not intended for long stays and housing, but this is not being respected in practice. The prevailing conditions of overcrowding and violations of fundamental rights in hotspots are contrary to target 10.7. At the same time, safety is a crucial issue, and vulnerable groups (women, children) face difficult conditions. Women experience risks such as repeated harassment and violence, while unaccompanied minors whose numbers in January 2020 were estimated at 5,463<sup>9</sup> (while in March 2020 more than 1,800 lived in the Greek hotspots<sup>10</sup> mainly in Moria on the island of Lesbos), suffer from insomnia, depression, persistent headaches and intense anxiety<sup>11</sup> while there are reports of developing or exacerbating mental health problems, suicide attempts and self-harm.<sup>12</sup> The Prime Minister did not follow through on his statement that he would personally assume responsibility for their care with corresponding action,<sup>13</sup> while only a small number of children were relocated in July 2020 under a European Commission program to Portugal and Finland. By way of summary, the above-mentioned conditions **run counter to Greece’s declaration in the 2018 Voluntary National Review on its commitment to promote gender equality and reducing inequalities - and through well-designed migration policies (SDG 5 and SDG 10, target 10.7).**

### Information on integration

The integration of immigrants and recognized refugees has been a matter of concern in Greek society since the early 1990s, when many immigrants from Balkan countries arrived in search of a better life. The absence of integration policies on top of piecemeal legislative interventions have allowed the emergence of hate speech from nationalist voices, a phenomenon that culminated during the economic crisis (2007-2008). However, the large inflow of refugee and migration populations in 2015 highlighted the need for a coherent integration framework.

8 Action On Armed Violence, “The Refugee Explosion - Case study: Greece”.

9 92.5% of them are boys and 7.5% girls, while 9% are under 14 years old. The majority of them are from Afghanistan (44%), Pakistan (21%), Syria (11%), while 24% have another nationality.

10 Caritas, “Appeal for the relocation of unaccompanied minors”.

11 Ethnos, “65 organizations are seeking the relocation of 1,800 unaccompanied refugee children from hotspots”.

12 Dianeosis, “A comparative analysis of the integration of migrants and refugees in Greece. Personal Experiences, Best Practices, Policy Proposals”, p. 38.

13 LIFO, “Moria: More than 1000 unaccompanied children - “Survive in marginally tolerable conditions”.”

Important integration policy initiatives related to the fulfilment of target 10.2 on “empowering and promoting social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status” and target 10.3 on “equal opportunity and reducing inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard” include **the Revision of the Citizenship Act (4332/2015)**, **the Immigration Act (4375/2016)** and the establishment of **the Ministry of Migration**.

The following is a brief overview of the individual sectors in relation to sustainable development:

- **Social inclusion of migrants (SDG 10, target 10.2)**

Refugees and migrants often find themselves faced with prejudices against them. In Greece in 2017, two thirds of natives believed that foreigners adversely affected the country as a place of residence, harm the economy and undermine their culture.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, discrimination is particularly evident, reported by more than a quarter of the population born in another, a larger percentage than any other OECD country.<sup>15</sup> However, at the height of the refugee crisis (2015-2016) there were volunteer support movements, as was the case with Greek islanders.<sup>16</sup>

**Self-reported discrimination by length of residence**

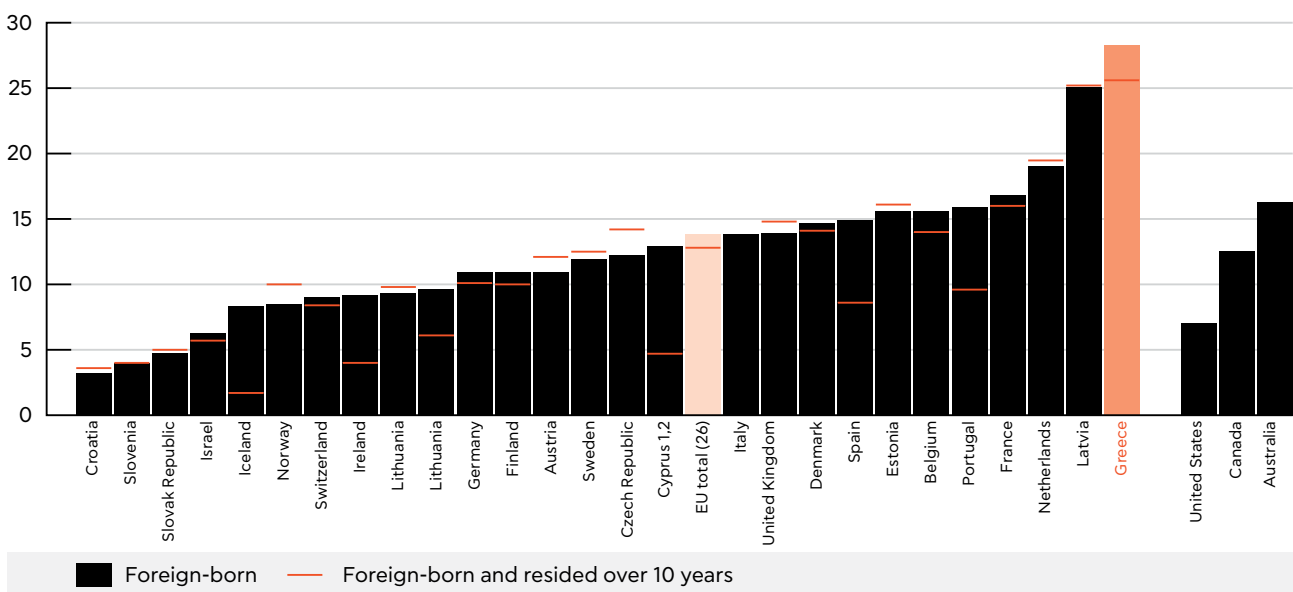


Figure 1: Percentage of migrants who reported having experienced discrimination. Source: OECD (2018)

14 OECD/European Union, “Settling in 2018 - Indicators of immigrant integration”, p. 128.

15 OECD/European Union, “Settling in 2018 - Indicators of immigrant integration”, p. 137.

16 euronews, “refugee crisis: ‘Heroes of the Aegean ’ to be nominated for a Nobel’.

- **Zero poverty (SDG 1)**

Tackling poverty through an inclusive labour market, while reducing unemployment and protecting labour rights were mentioned in Greece's 2018 Voluntary Review. However, the country, according to the evidence, is far from fulfilling this commitment.

- 14.4% of the total population lives below the poverty line,<sup>17</sup> which is 40% for immigrants.<sup>18</sup>
- In OECD countries, half of migrant children live below the poverty line, compared to around a quarter of their native peers. Greece belongs to the countries (together with Spain and the USA) where migrant children are at the highest risk of poverty.<sup>19</sup>
- In 2015, the average annual income of an immigrant was only EUR 5,428, placing Greece in the second lowest position among OECD countries,<sup>20</sup> far below the European average (EUR 12,510) and the OECD average (EUR 15,389). Greece has one of the greatest differences, in terms of average income, between migrants and natives.

A positive development is that it is now possible to register refugees or asylum seekers - entitled through their residence permit to enter the labour market - with the unemployment register of OAED.<sup>21</sup> In addition, the guaranteed minimum income scheme was introduced, a decisive step in protecting the most vulnerable social groups<sup>22</sup> - in which refugees could also be eligible.<sup>23</sup> However, in March 2020 the Parliament voted to limit financial assistance to refugees who have been granted asylum.<sup>24</sup> By way of an amendment introduced by the Ministry of Migration, benefits in cash and in kind expire 30 days after asylum is granted, while access to the programs of the International Organization for Migration and the social programs of the Ministry of Labour (child allowance, housing, guaranteed minimum income) remains in place.

- **Good health and Well-being (SDG 3)**

The Voluntary National Review<sup>25</sup> noted that viewing health as a social good and right is in line with Agenda 2030. In this context, Ministry of Health policies - linked to the fulfilment of the SDGs - were carried out giving uninsured citizens and vulnerable social groups free access to the public health system. A similar share of foreign- and native-born (5.5%) report unmet medical needs across both the OECD and the EU. However, Greece is among the countries (together with Sweden, Estonia, Italy) where there are notable differences

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17 OECD, "Measuring Distance to the SDG Targets 2019: An Assessment of Where OECD Countries Stand", p. 128.

18 OECD/European Union, "Settling in 2018 - Indicators of immigrant integration", p. 181.

19 OECD/European Union, "Settling in 2018 - Indicators of immigrant integration", p. 181.

20 OECD, "Measuring Distance to the SDG Targets 2019: An Assessment of Where OECD Countries Stand".

21 Hellenic Republic, National Reform Program (April 2019), p. 52.

22 Hellenic Republic, National Reform Program (April 2020), p. 67.

23 Nafthemporiki, "UNHCR: Safety net - opportunities for integration of recognized refugees".

24 star.gr, "Benefits to immigrants are axed".

25 General Secretariat of the Government Office of Coordination, Voluntary National Review on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, p. 43.



es between **native and non-EU migrants**: 1 out of 4 immigrants report unmet healthcare needs, against 1 out of 6 of their native peers.<sup>26</sup>

- **Quality education (SDG 4)**

Education contributes to the integration of refugees and migrants into the social and economic fabric of the host country. Although Greece emphasized its commitment to providing equal, quality education for all,<sup>27</sup> there is a great disparity in the educational level of immigrants and natives. In 2017, 38.7% of immigrants aged 15-64 were under-educated, compared to 26.1% of their native peers. Conversely, 17.1% of migrants were highly educated compared to 31.3% of natives.<sup>28</sup> At the same time, longer residence is associated with better knowledge of the host-country language. In Greece, refugees and migrants lack knowledge of the host language, placing the country together with Slovakia and Germany, in the worst performers among the 35 OECD countries.<sup>29</sup> In order to enhance the capacities for the education of refugees, special educational structures have been put in place and strengthened, and strategic planning has been developed by the Ministry of Migration to enable the education process to continue beyond compulsory education.<sup>30</sup> A major development has been the integration of all children from third countries living in reception centres or structures of the Greek State or the UNHCR into the education system in the school year 2016-2017, where 20.000 refugees have joined 800 reception classes. In addition, the Institute of Education Policy<sup>31</sup> provided support material for teaching Greek language.

- **Decent Work & Economic Development (SDG 8)**

For Greece, promoting full employment and decent work for all was a priority,<sup>32</sup> especially at a time when the economic recession caused high unemployment rates, which reached their peak in 2013 (27.8%). After the global economic downturn, the employment rate has decreased in all OECD and EU countries. The data are less favourable for migrants who across the board have higher unemployment rates than the native population. Greece and other southern European countries (Spain, Italy), which have received large numbers of migrants in recent years, have at the same time been badly hit by the recession. In these countries, the employment rates of migrants fell by 5 to 13 percentage points, at least twice as high as the corresponding rates of the native<sup>33</sup> population. In Greece, the unemployment rate of migrants stood at around 30% compared to 20.8% of the natives in 2017 - the worst performance among OECD countries<sup>34</sup> - while a very large proportion is faced with long-term unemployment. Greece is one of the new migrant destinations, with many

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26 OECD/European Union (2018) "Settling in 2018 - Indicators of immigrant integration", p. 114.

27 General Secretariat of the Government Office of Coordination, Voluntary National Review on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, p. 50.

28 OECD/European Union, "Settling in 2018 - Indicators of immigrant integration", p. 67.

29 OECD/European Union, "Settling in 2018 - Indicators of immigrant integration", p. 68.

30 Hellenic Republic, National Reform Program (April 2019), p. 43 -44.

31 Institute of Education Policy, 2015-2018.

32 General Secretariat of the Government Office of Coordination, Voluntary National Review on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, p. 35.

33 OECD/European Union, "Settling in 2018 - Indicators of immigrant integration", p. 73.

34 OECD/European Union, "Settling in 2018 - Indicators of immigrant integration", p. 77.





recent low-educated migrants, seeking low-skilled jobs.<sup>35</sup> The economic crisis has hit their key sectors of work, causing job losses, while many migrants arriving just before or during the recession have not been able to enter the labour market.

A positive development is the fact that the strategic guidelines of OAED, the Greek Public Employment Agency, for 2020-24, give priority to vulnerable groups further removed from the labour market, while the fields of action for the coming years include the Integration of Refugees into the Labour Market.<sup>36</sup>

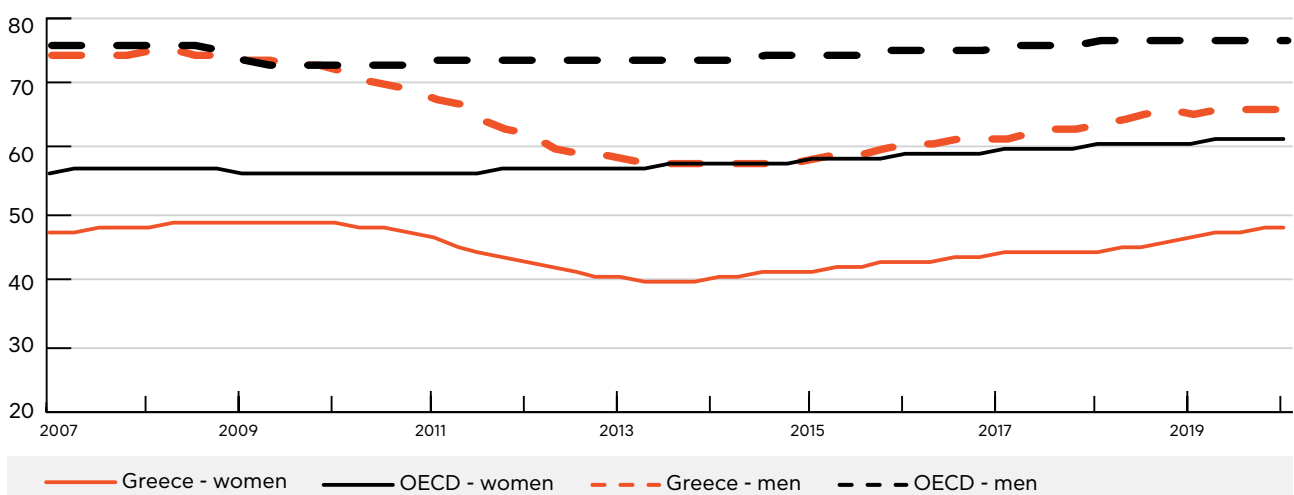
• **Gender (SDG 5)**

Even though achieving gender equality, through the social and economic empowerment of all women and girls, is one of the main priorities for Greece,<sup>37</sup> in practice the country is significantly lagging behind in terms of fulfilling SDG 5, according to OECD data for 2019. By way of illustration, the indicator of gender equality coverage in legislation (percentage of equality issues covered by legislation in a total of 45 equality issues) is 40% in Greece, compared to 66.6% in the OECD (min 40% Greece, max 90% Switzerland).<sup>38</sup>

In 2018, 2% more women than men were at risk of poverty or social exclusion (32.6% and 30.9%). For the year 2019, according to data from ELSTAT, the employment rate among men was 71.3% up from 70.1% in 2018 and 51.3% among women (from 49.1% in 2018), with a significant gender gap, and reaching the national target of 70% for men only (in line with the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy).<sup>39</sup> In 2020, women continue to suffer from low employment rates, well below the OECD average, but also below the male average in both Greece and OECD.<sup>40</sup>

**Figure 2. Employment rates are low, especially for women.**

Employment rates, % of working age population, s.a.



Γράφημα 2: Employment rates are low, especially for women. Source: OECD, 2020.

35 OECD/European Union, “Settling in 2018 - Indicators of immigrant integration”, p. 29.

36 Hellenic Republic, National Reform Program (April 2020), p. 22.

37 General Secretariat of the Government Office of Coordination, Voluntary National Review on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, p. 48.

38 SEV, Bulletin on Greek economy: “Sustainable growth for a strong economy!”, p. 11.

39 Hellenic Republic, National Reform Program (April 2020), p. 58.

40 OECD Economic Surveys, Greece (July 2020).

Focusing on women's empowerment, the Ministry of the Interior's former General Secretariat for Gender Equality<sup>41</sup> drafted the National Action Plan on Gender Equality 2016-2020 (GSGE),<sup>42</sup> while the General Secretariat for Family Policy & Gender Equality is currently implementing 3 projects (PEGASUS, Gender Public debate, SHARE) and in 2020 will draft the National Action Plan on Gender Equality for the next period (2020-2024).<sup>43</sup>

Especially for migrant women, their social and economic integration has coincided for a long time with the deep economic crisis that has hit the country. As early as 2017, the GSGE highlighted the high unemployment rates of migrant women, as the supply of work in the field of care for older people and children, which was a main source of income for them, has been significantly reduced, making them a sort of 'sub-proletariat'.<sup>44</sup> Finally, it is worth mentioning that in Greece the feeling of discrimination that immigrant women often experience on the grounds of origin is growing, and in relation to gender: 31% of foreign women report cases of discrimination, compared to 24% of foreign men.<sup>45</sup>

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41 The General Secretariat has since been moved to the Ministry of Labour and Social Security and is now the General Secretariat for Family Policy and Gender Equality.

42 Secretariat General for Gender Equality, National Action Plan on Gender Equality 2016-2020.

43 Hellenic Republic, National Reform Program (April 2020), p. 71.

44 Secretariat General for Gender Equality, National Action Plan for Gender Equality 2016-2020, p. 20.

45 OECD/European Union, "Settling in 2018 - Indicators of immigrant integration", p. 169.






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