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Motivations, experiences and consequences of returns and readmissions policy: revealing and developing effective alternatives



Executive Summary

Development of the Return and Readmissions policy across Europe: multilevel analysis

Case Study: **Greece**

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This document provides a concise summary of the key findings of Development of the Return and Readmissions policy across Europe: multilevel analysis (WP1). For detailed analysis, evidence, and comprehensive insights, please refer to the full report. The information in this summary should not be considered complete or fully representative of the entire study.

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Executive Summary – the case study of Greece

Introduction

Greece’s migration policies have evolved significantly, shaped by its transition from a country of emigration to one of transit and even destination. This significant shift has occurred due to the recent geopolitical developments, especially the 2015 refugee crisis, which saw over 850.000 individuals entering Greece mainly from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq (UNHCR, 2016). Greece, as an external border state of the EU, underscores its critical position in managing irregular migration.

Since the incorporation of the EU Directive 2008/115/EC, Greece has adopted return and readmission policies emphasizing both voluntary and forced returns. However, these policies have raised concerns regarding their effectiveness, human rights implications, and operational challenges. This executive summary report, part of the MORE project, provides an in-depth analysis of Greece’s return and readmission strategies, drawing from literature review and fieldwork (semi-structured interviews) conducted with key stakeholders in early 2024.

Evidence and Analysis

Policy Evolution and Challenges

The EU Directive aimed to balance member states’ sovereign rights with the protection of Human Rights. In the case of Greece, the implementation has revealed inefficiencies. According to Eurostat, during the 2014-2023 period, Greece issued 526.000 return orders but only 127.000 resulted in effective returns (Dimbrava & Radjenovic, 2024)¹. Law 3907/2011 introduced the formal procedure for returning TCNs to their home countries. The establishment of the Ministry of Migration Policy in 2016 marked a shift towards a more organized approach, yet enforcement measures, including detention, remain prevalent.

Assisted Voluntary Return Programs

The inception of AVRR programs in Greece have, since 2010, facilitated the return of over 60.000 individuals with reintegration support provided to approximately 11.000 of them

¹ Dumbrava, C., & Radjenovic, A. (2024). Towards a common EU system for returns. European Parliamentary Research Service. Retrieved 12, 23, 2024, from [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2024/757604/EPRS_BRI\(2024\)757604_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2024/757604/EPRS_BRI(2024)757604_EN.pdf)



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(IOM,2023)². The programs are managed by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in collaboration with Greek authorities, and they employ a phased approach encompassing pre-departure counselling, travel facilitation and post-arrival assistance.

Readmission agreements

Greece engaged in the bilateral agreements between the EU and Turkey (2016). However, the implementation of these agreements has been inconsistent largely due to diplomatic tensions and limited cooperation from third countries. The agreement held particular significance for the implementation of migration policies in Greece, as it sought to set a new procedural approach, which however faced criticism for human rights violations and ineffective implementation.

Detention Practices

In Greece, it appears that detention has been extensively employed while conditions in detention facilities remain substandard with reports highlighting inadequate medical care, poor sanitation and lack of legal assistance. Moreover, reliance on detention as a deterrent strategy raises concerns over proportionality and effectiveness.

Effectiveness of returns

Greece has issued over 540.000 return orders between 2013 and 2022, yet only 147.000 individuals have been returned. The low return rate is attributed to prolonged asylum procedures, administrative inefficiencies and lack of cooperation from third countries.

Policy Recommendations

Strengthening Voluntary Return Programs is essential to expand the scope and funding of AVRR programs to include more comprehensive reintegration support ensuring sustainable returns. Enhancing partnerships with CSOs in local and national level can provide tailored support for vulnerable groups, such as unaccompanied minors and individuals with health

² IOM. (2023). *AVRR Factsheet. September 2019 - June 2023*. Retrieved 12 23, 2024, from https://greece.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd11086/files/documents/2023-07/03_june_2023_0.jpg



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needs. In order to address operational inefficiencies an enhancement of case management systems is necessary, so as to bridge the gaps between asylum and return processes, enabling more coordinated and efficient decision making with a shared collaboration among EU member states. Readmission agreements should be transparent, enforceable and aligned with the obligations of each party. At the same time, respect of human rights and the choice of alternatives should be also taken into considerations.

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