

Refugees in Greece: MEPs demand solidarity, warn about impact of health crisis

The EU and its member states must help Greece manage its borders, according to Civil Liberties MEPs, who warn about the risk of COVID-19 spreading in refugee camps.

MEPs stressed that the current pandemic is yet more evidence that no country can deal with certain challenges alone. They praised the commitment to relocate 1,600 unaccompanied minors from the Greek islands to other EU countries, but requested clarification about when precisely this will happen and about which member states will participate. Some requested that relocation should also apply to other vulnerable asylum-seekers and to families.

Critical situation in refugee camps

Many MEPs are worried about a possible outbreak of COVID-19 in the overcrowded hotspots on the Greek islands, given the already dire conditions in which people are living. Some suggested transferring people to the Greek mainland or using empty hotel rooms to ensure social distancing, while others opposed any additional relocation, to avoid creating problems of public order.

The discussion also touched upon the crisis that followed Turkey's announcement one month ago that it would let people cross into EU territory. MEPs underlined that solidarity with frontline countries is key and that migration should not be used for political purposes. Several speakers also questioned the Greek authorities' decision not to accept any asylum requests for a month and reiterated that, as signatories to the Geneva Convention, all member states must respect the right to seek international protection.

In a [debate that you can watch again online](#), the Civil Liberties Committee assessed on Thursday the situation at Greece's external borders with Greek Ministers for Migration and Asylum, Notis Mitarachi, and for Citizen Protection, Michalis Chrisochoidis. Commission Vice-President Margaritis Schinas, Commissioner for Home Affairs Ylva Johansson, and the Croatian State Secretary for European and International Affairs, Terezija Gras, presented their views to MEPs, as did Frontex Executive Director, Fabrice Leggeri, and the Director of the EU's Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), Michael O'Flaherty.

Further information

Refugees on Greek islands: MEPs urge evacuation of camps to prevent spread of COVID-19 (23.03.2020)

Greek-Turkish border: MEPs reject Turkey's pressure, demand common asylum rules (10.03.2020)

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