



Kiriakos Mitsotakis: 'credit' for 'reducing flows' on the Aegean Sea: Part two – Registered arrivals



Late last week (20 May 2021), some 23 months into his tenure as Greece's Prime Minister, Kiriakos Mitsotakis announced his pride that:

'In the last two years, with the active support of Frontex, we have managed to reduce flows by almost 80% in 2020 and by an additional 72% from the beginning of the year until today.'

He added:

'I would like to warmly congratulate the Greek Armed Forces, the Greek Police, and especially the Greek Coast Guard and my colleagues in the government for the results they have achieved. I would also like to congratulate the Coast Guard and FRONTEX for the protection they provide against the risk of loss of human life at sea. The protection of our borders not only prevents irregular arrivals, but also protects human lives.'

We have seen no analysis of this claim, or indeed of whether such a development could be considered desirable or even legal. As a result, we have compiled our own 'review', within which we conclude:

- Mitsotakis' claim could only be considered accurate if one accepts a definition of the term 'flow' which equates to 'the number of people the Greek government has registered as arrivals in Greece'. This definition is used by absolutely nobody, and would reduce the term to practical uselessness even if Greece and the wider EU were not





breaking the law to prevent people being registered as ‘new arrivals’, which in fact they are

- Bearing in mind the first point, **the figures ‘almost 80%’ and ‘72%’ must be dismissed as inaccurate**: in fact, ‘flow’ has ‘reduced’ by 67.6% and 49.4%, respectively
- This **reduction has been achieved by an enormous increase in illegal pushbacks** carried out by the Greek government – and according to Mitsotakis’ statement, also Frontex – since 1 March 2020: this is the **sole** factor for which he and/or the wider EU can claim *any* responsibility
- Greece (and perhaps Frontex) **illegally pushed back at least 14,324 people in 2020 – 94.9 per cent** as many as the 15,087 men, women and children it registered as new arrivals that year. From 1 January to 19 May 2021, it registered 2,786 people as having arrived: from **1 January to 30 April 2021, it had illegally pushed back at least 3,286 men, women and children: 18 per cent more people (118 per cent) than it registered**
- Mitsotakis has **misused the terms ‘irregular arrivals’ and ‘border protection’**: neither have any legal relevance to the conversation he wishes to have, and both should therefore be dismissed and ignored
- The Greek government has in fact **reduced the number of people it has registered as ‘new arrivals’** – and thus allowed to enter the legal system and apply for asylum, as is their right – **to just 25 per cent** of people who have attempted to or managed to, reach Greece: **it has denied a staggering 75 per cent of people this right** from 1 January to 30 April this year
- Far from ‘safeguarding human lives’, as he claims, **Mitsotakis and his government have overseen the single greatest proportion of deaths per safe arrival of people crossing the Aegean Sea in recorded history**
- While Greece (and according to his statement, also Frontex) absolutely *has* reduced the number of people registered as new arrivals in Greece since 1 January 2020, by breaking international law and denying men, women and children their fundamental human rights, **by far the greatest factor in the reduction on ‘flow’ appears to have been the onset of the global COVID pandemic**

This review has proven to be considerably longer than we first imagined. As a result, we have divided it into five parts, of which this: ‘Registered arrivals’, is the second.

You can [access the whole review](#), or [download it as a pdf](#).

The other four parts are also available online or as pdfs:

Part one – The Data

Part three – [Deaths \(pdf\)](#)

Part four – [‘Irregular arrivals’ and ‘border protection’ \(pdf\)](#)

Part five – [Change in ‘flow’ – Greece and the EU, or other factors? \(pdf\)](#)





Registered arrivals

At this moment, it is worth noting briefly that the outstanding point about these figures is perhaps not so much the drop in number of people attempting to reach Greece – for which we can at least offer a number of possible explanations – but how extraordinarily-few of those who *do* make the attempt are actually allowed by Greece and the wider EU to enter the system as asylum seekers.

Given the simple fact that it is the absolute right of all men, women and children to travel, with or without paperwork, to find safe places to live, this is a shocking indictment of both Greece and the EU as a whole.

In short, the fact is that the EU-Turkey Statement was *specifically designed* to prevent people from reaching the EU, with a direct focus on preventing them from successfully travelling at all.

And certainly in the 14 and a half months since 1 March 2020, and to a lesser but still existent extent in the four years prior to that, the foundation of Greece's response to people arriving has been to illegally force them out without allowing them even to register.

There is no chance whatsoever that Greece – a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as the Refugee Convention and Refugee Protocols – could possibly believe this to be legal. Equally, there is no possibility that the EU, all of whose member-states are signatory to those three legal agreements, does not know that this is illegal *or* that it is happening.

Over the last six years, and even more regularly in the last year, aid organisations, international media, legal experts and the United Nations itself, have repeatedly and publicly shown that pushbacks are happening, in enormous number.

Parts of the EU itself, including many MEPs, but also at the Council of Europe, have *also* spoken out on the issue. Yet nothing, so far, has been done. It is convenient – and very likely true – for the EU Commission to argue that the Greek government says it is *not* pushing people back. We have seen the government say so repeatedly. But it is not acceptable for the EU to pretend that the Greek government denying it breaks the law is proof that it does not.

In any case, the facts are as follows:

After the enactment of the EU-Turkey statement in March 2016, 35,063 people were registered as arrivals in Greece. In the same period, the Turkish coastguard stopped and pushed back 17,190 people, 49 per cent as many as those who made the crossing. Sixty-eight people died.

Without factoring in pushbacks, for which we do not have the data at present, this means that of 52,321 people who attempted to reach Greece, just 32.9 per cent were actually registered as arrivals.

In 2017, 35,222 men, women and children were registered as new arrivals in Greece by land and sea. The Turkish coastguard intercepted and returned a further 21,937, and 54 people died. Of 57,213 men, women and children, 61.6 per cent were registered as arrivals.





In 2018, 50,446 people were registered as having arrived in Greece. 26,679 were prevented from reaching Greece by the Turkish coastguard. 174 men, women and children died. Of 77,299 people who tried to enter the asylum system, 65.3 per cent were allowed to do so.

In 2019, the first year Mitsotakis has invited us to consider, and the first year in which – from July – his party Nea Dimokratia – held power, 74,750 people were registered as arrivals. 60,366 were prevented from arriving by the Turkish coastguard, and 71 men, women and children died. Of 135,187 people who attempted to reach Greece, 55.3 per cent were registered by the Greek government.

The following year, 2020, was Nea Dimokratia's first in power. The Greek government registered 15,087 men, women and children as 'new arrivals'. 19,511 people were prevented from reaching Greece by the Turkish coastguard, 104 people drowned, and *at least* 14,324 were illegally pushed back by the Greek government and/or Frontex.

That is, in the first full year Nea Dimokratia held power, of 49,026 people who attempted to reach Greece and enter the asylum system, just 30.7 per cent – significantly less than a third, and fewer than even the first year of the EU-Turkey Statement – were registered by the Greek government.

To look at Mitsotakis' other chosen periods for comparison, 1 January-19 May 2020 and 1 January-19 May 2021, in the first, the Greek government registered 9,466 new arrivals in Greece. 9,768 were prevented from reaching Greece by the Turkish coastguard. 72 people died, while the Greek government pushed back *at least* 2,716 people.

Of 22,022 people who attempted to reach Greece, just 42.9 per cent were registered by the Greek government as arrivals.

This is the third lowest proportion on record, and took place in a period in which at least the first two months were before the Greek government's intensified pushbacks programme – a programme which slashed this proportion by a further 28 per cent.

In the equivalent period of this year, 2,786 people have been registered as arrivals in Greece. Five men, women and children died, 5,066 people were prevented from reaching Greece by the Turkish coastguard, and *at least* 3,286 people were pushed back *up to 30 April*.

Of 11,143 people who attempted to enter the EU asylum system, the Greek government registered just 25 per cent. The lowest number on record. At least three-quarters – 75 per cent – of all men, women and children who have tried to enter the Greek and EU asylum system from the East have been deliberately, calculatedly and illegally prevented from doing so.

This is the 'triumph' of the Greek government: reducing the number of people not who travel (for which, as we shall see, it can hardly claim responsibility) but the number of people it has registered as arriving – more accurately, the number it and the wider EU have illegally prevented from registering.

We must also note, once again, that ***the figures we are using for the people pushed back at the Evros river are almost certainly a significant underestimate***, and we simply do not have figures





for the number of people stopped from crossing by the Turkish police, or Greek and EU forces at the border itself.

Bearing this in mind, the scale of Greece, the EU, and Turkey's law-breaking is likely to be even greater.

Go to Part three – [Deaths](#)

