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# Joint Action Plan by the UK and Greece on migration

7-8 minutes

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## Aims

1. The governments of the UK and Greece maintain a long-standing, strong relationship, both at the bilateral and the multilateral level, including on managing illegal migration in the Eastern Mediterranean. This cooperation has been built upon the mutual recognition that addressing the continuing migratory pressures into and across Europe constitutes a shared challenge which requires a coordinated and comprehensive response – both in the present and the future without prejudice to the future framework of EU-UK relationship.

2. Greece is on the frontline standing as the nexus between Turkey and Europe in the field of migration. The UK recognises that Greece is developing additional capacity and capability within its migration system in response to the unique pressures faced. Yet migratory pressures in the Eastern Mediterranean remain.

3. As a result, the UK and Greece reaffirm their commitment, as agreed by both former Prime Ministers in June 2018, to deepen cooperation on migration; to work together towards building capacity in the region and reducing the flow of migrants whilst ensuring protection and support is made available to the most vulnerable, and the humanitarian situation in the Greek islands is improved.

4. Part of this cooperation is the clear recognition that the EU-Turkey Statement remains fundamental to tackling illegal migration in this region and to breaking the link between making the illegal and dangerous journey across the Aegean and remaining in Europe. This cooperation is without prejudice to Greece's obligations under EU law and in line with international commitments of the UK and Greece.

## **Actions**

5. The governments of the UK and Greece resolve to build a strategic relationship focused on areas of cooperation and support which add value and complement wider efforts to cope with migration challenges in the region. This includes:

a. Dismantling of migrant smuggling networks through enhancing the already existing communication, including exchange of information between UK and the Hellenic law enforcement and criminal justice authorities. In recognition of the ongoing threat posed by organised crime groups acting all over Europe, the UK's Organised Immigration Crime

(OIC) Taskforce benefits from excellent cooperation from the Hellenic police, prosecutors and judiciary; delivering significant operational successes through joint working and information sharing to dismantle OIC groups. Greece and the UK will work together in a joint, standing Task Force established to tackle Serious and Organised Crime facilitating illegal migration.

b. Ensuring the best interests of unaccompanied children in Greece are expediently considered and efficient transfers to the UK take place of those eligible under Section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016 and the EU Dublin III Regulation while the UK remains bound by this Regulation. To this end, the UK government removed the date criterion in the 'Dubs Amendment' which means that participating states, including Greece, can now refer the most vulnerable children regardless of when they arrived into Europe. The UK and Greece will ensure appropriate communication channels are readily available to grant support in transfers under Dubs/Dublin, or any future agreements.

c. Ensuring a smooth family reunification procedure for asylum seekers in Greece with relatives in the UK who are eligible under the Dublin III Regulation while the UK remains bound by this Regulation.

d. Interpretation support and expertise exchange between the Home Office and Greece's Reception and Identification Service (RIS) and Asylum Service (GAS). The UK and

Greece recognise the critical and valuable work of UK interpreters deployed to the Greek island Reception and Identification Centres. As RIS implements its own interpreter procurement model, the UK will continue to deploy interpreters to ensure resilience and share best practice subject to reviewing the ongoing need. The UK will also consider future requests to deploy interpreters to GAS to build similar Greek capability and facilitate expedient asylum decision-making. The UK and Greece will also continue to share operational expertise and guidance to develop processes on credibility assessments of asylum claims relating to sensitive issues.

e. Judicial cooperation. UK and Greek judges will continue their peer-to-peer learning to create efficiencies in the appeals process; and exchange expertise on case management, assessments and handling of sensitive cases. The expertise exchange will take place through meetings, seminars, workshops and any other means of team work.

f. Noting the challenge of implementing returns to countries of origin, the UK and Greece will establish a new partnership on returns, focussed on exchange of expertise, best practice and technical advice, including bilateral country-specific technical workshops, shadowing identification missions and options for supporting returns to countries of mutual interest. The UK and Greece will also continue to seek further opportunities for joint action in support of these ongoing

efforts.

g. Cooperation on search and rescue operations in the Aegean between the UK Border Force and the Hellenic Coast Guard. The UK and Greece recognise the ongoing pressing humanitarian situation in the Aegean and the vital work carried out by Border Force vessels. The UK and Greece will maintain communication channels and take necessary steps to ensure search and rescue cooperation can continue in the future, in the event that the UK partaking in FRONTEX operations is no longer viable and subject to ongoing review.

h. Recognition that the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean, further upstream and in the Greek island Reception and Identification Centres is fluid and continuously evolves. Taking into account tracking changes in trends and flows, the UK and Greece will continuously monitor the situation as it develops, and if necessary will ensure these joint actions and efforts are adjusted to the ongoing reality.

6. The UK and Greece will establish a strategic migration dialogue which will entail a meeting at senior level at least annually to review the progress and effectiveness of our joint initiatives; share good practice; and identify opportunities for further joint action. The dialogue will also serve as a forum for UK and Greece to exchange views on international policy developments in the field of migration. The dialogue will

enable us to complement wider efforts to maximise strategic effect. To this end, the dialogue can be extended to external partner participation where relevant.

Signed simultaneously in Greece and UK on 22 April 2020

by:

On behalf of the Government of the Hellenic Republic,  
Georgios Koumoutsakos, Alternate Minister of Migration and  
Asylum.

On behalf of the Government of the United Kingdom, Chris  
Philp, Minister for Immigration Compliance and the Courts.