

Risks, Rights & Safety at Sea

**Aegean Sea:
Greece/Turkey**

This information leaflet is for people who are considering to cross the Aegean Sea between Greece and Turkey. The undocumented crossing constitutes an offence both in Greece and Turkey and is above all very dangerous. This document aims neither to deter nor to encourage people to attempt the crossing but seeks to provide objective information about risks, rights and vital safety measures to take at sea. We wish that the information contained in this document can save your life but you should know it will not make the crossing safer.

For twenty years, the EU has been denying visas for most applicants. At the same time wars, conflicts and poverty are forcing out of their countries many people who wish to seek protection in Europe. Despite the lack of legal ways to reach European territory and despite life-threatening dangers, many of you decide to emigrate anyway and cross the sea-border.*

* Although this leaflet focuses specifically on the situation at the sea-border, some information can still be useful also for those who might decide to cross the land-border in the Evros region.

Alarm Phone Nr.:



+ 334 86 51 71 61

BEFORE SETTING OFF, READ THIS

Do you really want to put your life at risk?

Are you sure you want to put your life at risk when crossing the land- or seaborder? Every year, along the Greek-Turkish border 150-200 deaths are documented in average but real numbers are assumingly higher. In the past years there have also been many reports of people being intercepted at sea by the greek coastguards and pushed back to Turkey unlawfully, which also constitutes a dangerous situation.

Illegal Immigration Offence

Legal entry to Greece for non-EU citizens requires a visa, without which migrants are criminalized. If they catch you while you exit Turkey without permit and undocumented, you will be charged of the offense of illegal exit or entry from/to Turkey. The administrative fine for this is between 1000 and 2000TL as defined in article 102/a of the Law of Foreigners and International protection (Law No. 6458 of 04/04/2013). The full English text of the law can be found here: <http://tinyurl.com/lr22p7m>

IF YOU DECIDE TO LEAVE, READ THIS

Usually the crossing happens at night, aboard small and overloaded boats. Some boats sink or capsize because of bad weather conditions, panic on board, or because they are old and in poor condition. It has also been reported that border authorities have pushed people back from where they came or have behaved violently, thereby putting them into greater danger. Often other boats at sea do not come to rescue migrants in distress even after spotting them. The following information will not make the crossing safe. **You might also find yourself in situations in which you can't follow these suggestions, for example because the captain of your boat doesn't allow you to do so. In any case, this flyer gives you ideas about what to expect and how to prepare. When you organize in groups and prepare for the crossing, your influence on decisions can get bigger. These information might save your life.**

Buy a life vest and supplies

- Make sure that there are enough life vests on board for everybody! You can buy one in advance for 30 Turkish Lira (TRY). Put them on as soon as your boat leaves and wear them all the time.
- The risk of falling into the sea or getting wet is very high. Wrap all your valuables in a plastic bag and have it on you. Consider that everything that is not on you risks getting lost if the boat capsizes. As your personal belongings might get lost or stolen, make copies of anything important such as documents that you need as evidence in your asylum case;
- Take water and some food with you;
- Wear clothes fitted for the season, but do not forget to pack warm clothes and a waterproof jacket.

Make sure that the emergency equipment on the boat is functioning

- Make sure that there are emergency and warning signals on board! Distress rockets and smoke canisters can save your life. In any case, anything likely to attract other people's attention can be useful: whistles, bright coloured clothes, plastic bags, mirrors, mobile phones or camera flashes, a torch, etc.

Check your mobile phone

- Most parts of the Aegean sea have mobile phone coverage. Mobile phones can therefore become important tools to call for help or document possible push-back cases;
- Make sure your mobile phone is charged and has enough credit to make several international calls (at least 50 TRY). Usually you are told not to use your phone during the border crossing, so they are usually switched off during the trip. You should wrap it in a waterproof plastic bag so as to protect it from seawater. This makes making calls during the trip very difficult. However, if possible, the phone should always be kept on you and in a place easily accessible so that if something happens you can reach it to call for help and use it to document what is happening.
- number from this leaflet.
- Take along numbers of relatives and acquaintances based in Turkey and/

or in Europe, and let them know about your trip prior to departure, so that they can call rescue services if they do not hear from you in due time.

- If you have a smartphone, you can download apps that allow you to share your coordinates with a chosen number in one click (for instance: One Touch SOS: <http://tinyurl.com/lwc8pjl>, for Android; and SOS My Location: <http://tinyurl.com/l3oug29>, for Iphone). You can also send your location using Whats App and Viber. You can send your coordinates to this number (+ 49 163 5024825) if you are in distress, if you are victim of a pushback (illegal return to Turkey by the Greek coast guard. NO PHONECALLS ARE ACCEPTED AT THIS NUMBER. IF YOU WANT TO CALL, CONTACT THE ALARMPHONE: 0033 486 517 161 (SEE BOX).
- If you have been already located by the Greek Coast Guard you can use your phone in case the situation allows it. If you think you can use it despite the presence of the Greek coast guard make as many calls as possible to as many of the numbers provided as possible to let many organisations know of your presence and your location.

Check the weather forecast for the departure and destination locations

Check on the internet or on TV that the weather is good for the next two days at departure and destination points. Popular sources of information are:

- <http://meteo.gr/meteoplus/sailingmaps.cfm>
- http://poseidon.hcmr.gr/waves_forecast.php?area_id=aeg

Do not get on board of an overloaded or damaged boat

- Make sure that the wooden or rubber hull is in good condition. No holes, torn or deflated parts! If the boat is in poor condition, your life is at immediate risk!
- On average, a ten metre long boat cannot take more than 10 people on board. This number goes up to 30 people for a 20 metre long boat. An overloaded boat is exposed to the risk of sinking!
- Make sure there is enough fuel for the double length of the planned trip! Make sure that there are enough paddles, that they are in good condition,

AT SEA

Precautions during the trip

- Observe carefully and try to document (by writing it down, for example) everything that happens or that you see during the trip. Any information about places and times can be useful in case of emergency. Take notes, pictures and GPS coordinates if possible. Watch out around you for rocks or other boats that could cause collisions!
- Protect yourself from the cold, and try to keep your clothes as dry as possible.
- Don't move around the boat so as to keep the balance at all times!
- Keep a calm attitude and avoid conflicts at any cost! Help each other and protect each other's lives. In the past years, solidarity amongst the people on board has saved many lives!
- Hold on firmly to the boat. Any abrupt movement or any panic reaction can put yourself at risk as people can easily fall off the boat, and the boat itself can capsize! There have been several cases in which women and children have died as they were trapped in the cabin underdeck. At the same time, sometimes, especially with bad weather, it is also dangerous to be outside. So if you are in the cabin, be alert to what is happening outside and make sure you can easily get out of it.

In case of danger or distress at sea, call for help

If you are in immediate danger (for example if the sea is too rough, if your boat broke down or got lost, if someone fell off board), call the coast guards immediately. Whatever your nationality or legal situation, rescuing people in distress at sea is an unconditional obligation for all captains of all boats around as well as for coastal states.

Contact the rescue teams by using the following numbers, and try to find someone on board who can speak the local language or English. Specify to them:

- that you are in distress
- your GPS location
- the number of people onboard (men, women, and children)
- the health conditions of the passengers who are sick
- the size and condition of the boat (is any water leaking in? Is the engine running properly?)

Greece: +30 210 41 12 500

Turkey:

- + 90 312 231 91 05
- + 90 312 425 - 33 37
- + 90 312 417 50 50 (If you hear a turkish voice-box, press „0“!)

The International Emergency Number: 112

If you have a VHF radio onboard, **send a MAYDAY** (instructions on how to do that available at: www.wikihow.com/Call-Mayday-from-a-Marine-Vessel).

WatchTheMed Alarm Phone



+ 334 86 51 71 61

This number is NOT A RESCUE NUMBER but an ALARM NUMBER to support rescue operations. We created this number together with activists from different transnational networks who are in solidarity with migrants and refugees. We don't have boats or helicopter to carry out rescue operations, so please make sure you **FIRST CALL THE COAST GUARD**. What we can do is follow up on their response, making known to them that we are informed and 'watching' them, If you are not promptly rescued or if you are being pushed back, we will **INFORM THE MEDIA** and protest against this.

While waiting for rescue or if you see coastal lights or another vessel nearby, try to attract attention in any possible way (by launching a distress rocket, by emitting orange smoke from a canister, by waving bright coloured clothes, by using the reflection of a mirror, by flashing a torch at night, by shouting, whistling, by flashing your mobile phones or any other electronic device). Do not light any fire on the boat to attract attention.

In case of distress, do not try to save any of your belongings, your backpack or luggage.

If someone falls overboard or the boat is sinking

- If somebody falls into the water stop the boat immediately. Do not lose sight of this person until he/she has been rescued! Throw a life buoy, life vest or any other floating object next to this person as soon as possible. Do what you can do without risking your own life.
- A single person in the water with a life vest must adopt a foetal position, or float on his/her back if without any life vest. Several people in the water with life vests must tie themselves to each other to balance themselves, and warm each other up, or float on their backs all tied to each other if without life vests.
- When the person is back on board, take his/her clothes off, dry him/her and wrap a blanket around him/her. If there is no sign of breathing, keep his/her mouth closed, blow in his/her nose, and apply cardiac massage.
- If the entire boat has capsized, try to hang on to it, or to any floating parts.

During rescue: keep calm!

When being rescued by another boat, remain seated and do not make any abrupt movement in the boat as this could make it capsize. If you wish to ask for asylum, say it clearly. The captain rescuing you must make sure that you have access to an asylum request procedure if you ask for it, and to take you to a harbour in a safe country where you will not be threatened.

Push-backs definition

Push-backs are collective expulsions that are clearly prohibited under international law. A collective expulsion is any measure compelling aliens, as a group, to leave a country before a reasonable and objective examination of the particular case of each individual of the group. Article 19 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights bans collective expulsions. That right is broken when push-backs occur. Everyone enjoys protection from collective expulsions, including those with irregular status. The prohibition on collective expulsions applies to the whole territory of the state concerned, including its territorial waters.

Push-backs

There have been several reports about push-backs to Turkey (see box above for an explanation of push-backs). Push-backs are not only illegal, but they are also usually very dangerous with the lives of people seriously at risk. So try to keep calm and protect your life and that of the other people on the boat. If there is a risk to life or a distress situation don't hesitate to call for help, no matter if that means being arrested by the Turkish authorities. Also, try to remember and collect any detail that might help to identify the boat(s) and the officers of the involved border authorities such as boat numbers, boat colour or anything describing the officers' physical appearance.

Puncturing of the boat

In the past, people have been advised to puncture their boat once they were intercepted by the Greek Coast Guard in order not to be pushed back to Turkey because, according to law, the Coast Guards are obliged to save your lives if you are in danger. This, however, constitutes a very dangerous practice and has cost the lives of many people. There is no guarantee that you will not be pushed back if you puncture your boat and, according to law, the person who punctured the boat can be criminalised for putting people's lives in danger.

IF YOU REACH GREEK TERRITORY

For a comprehensive guide on who can help you and what you can do once you arrive in Greece, see the info-guide on the “Welcome To Europe” website: <http://w2eu.info/greece.en/articles/greece-guide.en.html> (the guide also exists in Farsi, Arabic and French).

Avoiding push-backs from Greek land

There have been several reports of push-backs happening even once people have already reached Greek land. In order to avoid this, if it is still dark, wait until daylight before you hand yourselves to the authorities. However, if there are people in your group who are injured or not feeling well, you should call the ambulance immediately (number: 166). Keep in mind that there are big areas on the Greek islands that are not very populated, so it is easy to lose your way and wander around without reaching anybody for several hours. Try to go to a lively place where there are many people. It is important that many people see you, so that the risk of being pushed back is minimized. You should communicate to the authorities that you are on the island after reaching any lively area. As long as you have not been arrested and registered by the police, taking you in a bus, taxi or private car is forbidden to the citizens according to law.

Asking for asylum

Right to asylum

The 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees holds that the term “refugee” applies to any person who because of his or her “fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country, or who, not having a nationality and being outside of the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.” (Article 1A).

You have crossed a border unofficially, which is forbidden according to law. Anyway you are allowed to ask for asylum at any times and to have access to an appropriate asylum procedure. To apply for asylum in Greece you have to personally lodge an asylum application before the competent authority, which is the Asylum Office (on Lesbos island, Rhodes island, South and North Evros Region, in Athens, in Amygdaleza detention camp, in Thessaloniki and in Patras). For information about the asylum procedure, you can call (only from Monday to Friday during office hours!): UNHCR: 0030-210-6726462/3; Greek Council for Refugees: 0030 210-3800990; Ecumenical Refugee Programme: 0030 210 72 95 926. If you are detained or in a First Reception Center, the detention authorities or the First Reception authorities will register your will to seek international protection and refer you to the competent examination authority. For a detailed list of organisations in Europe and information about asylum procedures, visit the following web page: www.w2eu.info

Illegal entry, registration and detention

Since you have entered Greece without permission it is likely that the police will detain you. On the Greek islands, there is one First Reception Centre (in Moria/Mytilene) and two Screening Centres (in Samos and Chios). At the different centres you will be registered and fingerprinted. In Greek detention centres, the detention times vary a lot, depending on where you arrived, how full the centres are, etc. In First Reception centres you should usually not stay longer than 25 days. However, you can possibly be transferred to other detention centres. You need to be aware that in Greek detention centres you can be detained up to 18 months (and in rare cases even longer) if you are older than 18, although usually people are kept in detention for much shorter periods (the period of detention depending usually on how many people are being held at that moment). Minors (between 1-17 years old) should not be detained according to law! Anyway they stay in detention until the authorities find them a place in an open camp for children, usually between a few days up to 1-3 months in the worst cases. When you get released, adults will receive a ‘white paper’ from the police. The paper says that you are told to leave Greece and go back to your country within a period of a few days up to 30 days. This paper is neither a travel document nor a residence permit. It protects you, however, from being arrested for the period of time specifically mentioned on it if you don’t go to Patras or Igoumenitsa cities. If it expires you are at risk of being arrested and detained again. If you are a minor your paper will not expire until you get 18. If you are from Syria you will be released very soon after you have been registered and identified as Syrian. Syrians are given a “Suspension of the deportation” paper, which is valid for six months (from the day of its issuance) and can be renewed.

If you end up in Turkish Territory

If you are pushed back to Turkey or arrested by the Turkish coast guard you can be detained in a detention camp in Turkey for some days (the duration of detention varies but it is usually short). The period of detention depends largely on if you have been arrested before by the Turkish authorities and also if you have registered for asylum or not. It also depends on the place where you are detained. There have been cases in which Turkish coast guards did not transfer people to detention centres but set them free instead. If you are in detention, you can seek legal help here: Multeci Der in Izmir, Turkey (+90 232 483 54 21) or Helsinki People Assembly in Istanbul (+90 212 292 68 42 or +90 212 292 68 43).

Report any deaths or violations of your rights

If people died or went missing from your boat, or if you have lost family members and want to trace them, you have to report it to the authorities that arrested you, as well as the Red Cross in Athens (+30 210 8259002) and the UNHCR (+30 2106726462/3).

If you were in distress and a boat failed to fulfil its duty to rescue you while aware of your situation or if you have been pushed back by the Greek Coast Guard or international border police from Greek waters/ land to Turkey write to: contact@w2eu.info or info@watchmed.net

We wish to collect your testimony and condemn those who are responsible so that these situations do not repeat themselves. Try to give as many details as you can, and send us any picture or video of the crossing. Your identity will not be revealed, and your testimony will remain anonymous.

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Watch the med (www.watchthemed.net)

