

Advocates Abroad Statement on EU-Turkey Deal

This year, the 20th of March marks the one year anniversary of the implementation of the EU-Turkey deal in which Europe is permitted to return “irregular migrants” from Greece to Turkey. As Advocates Abroad works on the ground in Greece directly with refugees and asylum seekers, our volunteers have witnessed and documented how this deal has affected the lives of the most vulnerable seeking protection in Europe. We strongly disagree with statements by some EU leaders that this deal has been a success.

Under the EU-Turkey deal, European caseworkers assess not whether a person qualifies for asylum, but only whether they can be returned to Turkey pursuant to an admissibility procedure. This scheme fails to meet Europe’s obligations under the Refugee Convention to examine asylum claims on an individual basis and is a breach of the principal of non-refoulement. Moreover, Turkey does not provide full refugee status to non-Europeans and it has been widely recognized that Turkey is not a “safe third country.” Meanwhile, the reality on the ground is that the procedures for processing refugees in Greece is so inefficient that asylum seekers have languished in the camps and shelters in Greece for up to one year in degrading and overcrowded conditions. In addition, refugees are forced to go without access to appropriate and necessary services such as education and medical and psychological services. This past year, Advocates Abroad’s volunteers have documented refugee deaths, suicides, and abuse.

The International Rescue Committee (IRC), the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and Oxfam have just issued a report and policy recommendations condemning the EU-Turkey deal and outlining these issues, entitled “[The reality of the EU-Turkey statement: How Greece has become a testing ground for policies that erode protection for refugees.](#)” Advocates Abroad strongly supports and concurs with this joint NGO statement.

The joint NGO report discusses in particular the great need for and lack of legal assistance and counseling for asylum seekers, further exacerbating an unfair asylum system in which the rights of asylum seekers are diminished. Advocates Abroad continues to try to fill this need by providing direct legal and non-legal assistance to asylum seekers in the camps, detention centers, and shelters throughout Greece.

