



MIGRATION PROGRAMME

**Looking for seasonal workers:  
Greece's search for migrant labor**

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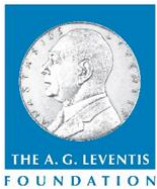


# Looking for seasonal workers: Greece's search for migrant labor

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## Summary

The present report deals only with the recruitment/invitation of third-country nationals through bilateral agreements as a framework for addressing labor shortages. In other words, we focus only on the invitation of foreign workers, with an emphasis on skilled and low-skilled labor, rather than Blue Card holders. The report forms part of a larger project looking into legal labor migration. The first publication presented [a snapshot of practices across select member states](#), while this paper zooms in on Greece to explore the practical issues that have arisen in the context of the attempt to recruit foreign workers.

The emphasis on partnerships also reflects the Greek government's current policy priority in addressing labor shortages, with more agreements expected in the next few months. Thus, it is a good time to pause and take in where things stand as regards implementation and future planning, and what issues require further attention.

Through a discussion and analysis of current practices and issues, the report seeks to highlight two things:

- a pattern of responding to labor shortages by the Greek state, which tends to replicate previous practices without 'daring' to be more creative.
- the bureaucratic obstacles (which relate in particular to the process of inviting foreign workers works—*metaklisi*) that continue to hamper the implementation of these partnerships.

Finally, the report incorporates a series of recommendations based also on consultation with different stakeholders<sup>1</sup> as well as with individuals who have been involved in the *metaklisi* process.

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<sup>1</sup> A non-attribution policy is applied to discussions with stakeholders.

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## Introduction

In March 2023, in the context of the East Macedonia Thrace Forum II, the former Minister for Migration and Asylum and current member of parliament, Mr Dimitris Kairidis, noted that “Greece today, is facing, perhaps for the first time and certainly to such an extent, the problem of a shortage of legal labor migrants. [...] we're not just talking about low skill; we're talking about high skill”.<sup>2</sup>

Public discourse on legal migration is relatively new in Greece. More than a decade of financial crisis, coupled with the European ‘refugee crisis’ of 2015, resulted in an over-focus on addressing irregular migration. Reduced opportunities and high unemployment led many legal migrants, particularly those of Albanian origin, to seek better opportunities in Italy and the UK. The COVID-19 pandemic and the green transition produced [structural changes in the labor market](#), resulting in labor shortages across the EU and also in Greece.

The pandemic [aggravated](#) the labor shortages which have been apparent for many years in health, information and communication. The sectors facing the greatest shortages include construction and hospitality, where employees leaving for jobs with better working conditions led to countries scrambling to attract new labor to fill the gaps. As highlighted in the research, the problem is not only filling the available jobs, but also finding workers with the skills required. The green and digital transitions have generated a need for skills that may not necessarily exist yet in certain sectors (e.g. in construction). While some countries (e.g. Germany) are taking steps to recalibrate education and (re)train their workforce to facilitate the acquisition of the skills needed in the labor market, there is a growing realization that migration—and labor migration, in particular—can provide some of the answers to the needs of the labor market. At the same time, migration remains a highly politicized topic, with member states attempting to balance tough policies aimed at deterring irregular migration with opening pathways for legal labor migration.

This dual approach is more prevalent still in the countries of the Southern Mediterranean, including Greece, which has changed both its discourse and its policy vis-a-vis labor migration. The country is increasingly looking to countries in Asia and North Africa to provide the much-needed supply of labor, while agreements with third countries have risen to prominence in recent years as Greece seeks to attract foreign labor and plug the gaps in different sectors. Reflecting the needs of the Greek economy, the emphasis has been on seasonal and temporary work, and predominantly on skilled rather than high-skilled labor.

Forming partnerships with third countries to promote legal mobility is not new. Back in December 2006, the European Council stated in its conclusions that “while respecting the competences of member states in this area, consideration will be given to how legal migration opportunities can be incorporated into the Union's external policies in order to develop a balanced partnership with third countries adapted to

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<sup>2</sup> The full speech in Greek is available via his [official website](#)

specific EU member states' labor market needs; ways and means to facilitate circular and temporary migration will be explored; [...]".<sup>3</sup>

The mobility component is crucial and often comes accompanied by a clause on irregular migration management.

Greece signed bilateral labor agreements in the 1990s with Albania (1997, still in force<sup>4</sup>), Egypt<sup>5</sup> and Bulgaria<sup>6</sup>. In the case of Albania and Bulgaria, the focus was on seasonal agricultural workers being granted residence and work permits to meet the demand from Greek employers (*metaklisi*). In the case of Egypt, the initial agreement covered the fisheries sector, with an additional agreement signed allowing for the mutual transfer of social security rights and. Greece also pursued regularization programs during that period, in line with practices applied in Italy and Spain.

In 2022, acknowledging the increased demand for labor and the limited supply, Greece expanded its partnership framework, inviting a quota of foreign workers from specific countries while also expanding the overall quota that can be recruited for seasonal and/or temporary work. Several issues have arisen, however, hampering the process.

The present report deals only with the recruitment/invitation of third-country nationals through bilateral agreements as a framework for addressing labor shortages. In other words, we focus only on the invitation of foreign workers, with an emphasis on skilled and low-skilled labor, rather than Blue Card holders. The report forms part of a larger project looking into legal labor migration. The first publication presented [a snapshot of practices across select member states](#), while this paper zooms in on Greece to explore the practical issues that have arisen in the context of the attempt to recruit foreign workers.

The emphasis on partnerships also reflects the Greek government's current policy priority in addressing labor shortages, with more agreements expected in the next few months. Thus, it is a good time to pause and take in where things stand as regards implementation and future planning, and what issues require further attention.

Through a discussion and analysis of current practices and issues, the report seeks to highlight two things:

- a pattern of responding to labor shortages by the Greek state, which tends to replicate previous practices without 'daring' to be more creative.

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<sup>3</sup> Council of the European Union, 16879/1/06 REV 1, "Presidency Conclusions – Brussels, 14/15 December 2006", as well as European Commission, COM (2007) 248 final, "Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, on circular migration and mobility partnerships between the European Union and third countries", Brussels, 16.05.2007.

<sup>4</sup> Ratified with Law 2482/1997 (National Gazette, A' 73), "Agreement of seasonal employment of labor-force between the Government of the Hellenic Republic and the Government of the Republic of Albania".

<sup>5</sup> Initial agreement Ratified with Law 1453/1984 (National Gazette, A' 88).

<sup>6</sup> valid until the end of the transitional period on 1 January 2009, during which the freedom of movement of Bulgarian citizens seeking employment in the European Union (EU) was restricted

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- the bureaucratic obstacles (which relate in particular to the process of inviting foreign workers works—*metaklisi*) that continue to hamper the implementation of these partnerships.

Finally, the report incorporates a series of recommendations based also on consultation with different stakeholders<sup>7</sup> as well as with individuals who have been involved in the *metaklisi* process.

The report begins with a brief background on legal labor migration to Greece. The main body explores the most recent agreements with Bangladesh and Egypt and puts forth a series of issues that have arisen and been highlighted by stakeholders. The question of regularization programs vs agreements is also explored. We suggest that both are needed, particularly when the shortcomings of the existing structural mechanisms are factored in. Finally, the report concludes with a series of policy recommendations that emerged from the research as well as from discussions with stakeholders.

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<sup>7</sup> A non-attribution policy is applied to discussions with stakeholders.

## Three decades of legal labor migration to Greece

### From the 1990s to the pandemic (1990 -2021)

Greece has transitioned since the 1990s from a sending country to a country of settlement as well as immigration. The economic growth of the 1980s following the country's accession to the European Economic Communities (EEC), combined with a rise in the living standards and educational level of the native population, led to a demand for workforce. As Greeks began opting out of seasonal jobs and preferring positions that matched their qualifications, job vacancies appeared at the lower end of the occupational scale<sup>8</sup>. In that early period, immigration responded to both economic needs and the demographic decline experienced in rural areas as a result of urban mobility as well as emigration to other countries in Europe<sup>9</sup>. Research has shown that immigrants in the Greek economy in the mid-1990s were absorbed in the agricultural sector and in unskilled work (around 30% and 12% respectively, in four regions of northern Greece)<sup>10</sup>. Employment, particularly in agriculture, was seasonal and predominantly attracted workers from neighboring countries such as Albania, Bulgaria and Poland<sup>11</sup>.

Bilaterally, Greece had—until 2020—limited partnerships with third countries for legal labor mobility. All three of the countries involved—Albania, Bulgaria and Egypt—were seen not only as a way of acquiring temporary labor migrants, but also as a way of enhancing “[inter-governmental cooperation at economic, social and cultural levels](#)” according to the Greek State. Migration was perceived as a domestic issue, under the purview of the Ministry for Citizens Protection and Ministry of the Interior.

The absence of a consistent policy on labor migration from third countries is due to a contradiction that is also noticeable in other Southern EU member states like Italy: the [restrictions and crackdowns](#) systematically introduced served to render the mechanisms for legal entry and stay largely prohibitive. Strong gate-fencing and weak gate-keeping strategies<sup>12</sup> allowed migrants to be absorbed in the informal labor market while maintaining their precarious undocumented status. In particular, countries like Greece and Italy have deployed bureaucratic procedures to make settlement and particularly legal settlement (either through regularization or legal arrival) difficult, and as result both have exhibited considerable inconsistency in matching of labor market needs and immigration policies over the past thirty years.

For Greece, part of the reason is the overall approach to migration. In the late 1990s, migrant labor was welcomed, because it contributed much needed [low-skilled 'hands' in rural areas](#). Most entered undocumented and accessed the informal labor market, with different provisions introduced between

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<sup>8</sup> Kasimis, C. (2013). Greece, migration 1830s to present. In *The Encyclopedia of Global Human Migration*, I. Ness (Ed.). <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444351071.wbeghm259>

<sup>9</sup> Kasimis, C., & Papadopoulou, A.G. (2005). The multifunctional role of migrants in the Greek countryside: implications for the rural economy and society. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 31(1), 99–127. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183042000305708>, p.107.

<sup>10</sup> Lianos, T., Sarris, A. and Katseli, L. (1996). Illegal Immigration in Local Labour Markets: the Case of Northern Greece. *International Migration* 34(3): 449–484.

<sup>11</sup> Vaiou, D., & Hatzimichalis, K. (1997). *With the sewing machine in the kitchen and the Polish in the fields. Cities, regions and informal labor*, Athens: Exantas (in Greek)

<sup>12</sup> Triandafyllidou, A., & Ambrosini, M. (2011). Irregular Immigration Control in Italy and Greece: Strong Fencing and Weak Gate-keeping serving the Labour Market. *European Journal of Migration and Law*, 13(3), 251–273. <https://doi.org/10.1163/157181611X58784>



the late 1990s and mid-2000s to regularize their stay. However, the key criteria for regularization were—and remain—the migrants' contribution to the national economy. Migrants were not particularly welcomed, nor encouraged to integrate otherwise. As a direct result, Greek policies over the past thirty years have sought to emphasize the prevention of undocumented migration which was nonetheless absorbed into the economy until the crisis period.

The first Greek law that regulated immigration (L1975/1991) established the system of *metaklisi*, i.e. the hiring of third-country nationals for the purpose of employment in specific sectors. *Metaklisi* was a two-step process: step one was the determination of quotas, skills and the length of time potential employees would be required to stay. Step two was the actual recruitment and issuance of visas. The entire process could last up to 18 months. Recognizing that the system was not only failing to address needs, but often resulted in people being hired informally in the Greek labor market (undocumented migrants, for example), resulting in the exploitation of individuals (as evidenced by [the case of Manolada](#)) as well as revenue losses for the state, the process was updated in 2005. Past research showed<sup>13</sup> that most employers—in the urban centers especially (for example in the construction or service industry) opted out of inviting foreign workers for employment positions of short and midterm duration, deterred by the lengthy bureaucracy that often resulted either in the applicant being rejected by the Greek consulates abroad or in the expiration of the deadline. When migrants were permitted to enter the country, they did so mostly from neighboring countries to undertake seasonal work in the fields of agriculture and fisheries. This was particularly the case with migrants from Albania, the Republic of North Macedonia, and Bulgaria. Because most workers were known to the farmers, who employed them every year, it was feasible to submit specific requests for workers to the municipality, while the requirements remained relatively stable over the years, simplifying the process.

The economic crisis of 2009 severely impacted both the employment rates of the migrant population as well as the attractiveness of Greece as a country for labor migration. It is unsurprising therefore that labor migration was not a priority, and that no specific measures were undertaken about foreign labor.

In 2014, Greece sought to undertake one of the largest legislative migration reforms in its recent history, through the Migration Code. The Migration Code sought to streamline the management of permits, work and insurance issues for seasonal migrants working in agriculture or fisheries. These are both areas of seasonal migration from neighboring countries (Egypt for fisheries; Albania and other Balkan countries for agricultural work).

The [Migration Code](#) maintained *metaklisi* not only as a concept, but as a procedure. The only change was that the quotas were announced every two years rather than annually, allowing for better planning. Nonetheless, the core structural problems remained, rendering the procedure particularly unrealistic for small and medium-sized firms/employers interested in bringing in workers for the construction and services industries.

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<sup>13</sup> Triantafyllidou, A., & Maroufouf, M. (2009). Η εγκατάσταση των Μεταναστών στην Ελλάδα. Δυναμικές ένταξης και προβλήματα καταγραφής. In Takis, A. (ed.) *Μετανάστευση, ετερότητα και θεσμοί υποδοχής στην Ελλάδα. Το στοιχείο της κοινωνικής ένταξης*. Θεσσαλονίκη, Σάκκουλας, pp. 39–81.

## Post-pandemic shifts & reforms

Like other European countries, Greece faced an exodus of workers, including immigrants (legal and irregular), from the labor force during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic; many of them never returned. Regularization programs like those introduced by Italy in 2020 attracted undocumented migrants from Greece who sought to move and legalize their stay in a country where opportunities for employment existed in similar fields to Greece. Despite the prevalent rhetoric, the number of refugees in the country post-2015 was insufficient to address the needs of the labor market. At the same time, [as noted by Kapsalis](#), the policing and control measures put in place in 2020 (and particularly after the Evros incident), which were unprecedented in both their scope and intensity, prevented migrant land workers who wished to return to their regular 'employment' picking strawberries, pepper, onions and tobacco from doing so. This further increased labor shortages.

The post-pandemic period is one of major contradictions in the structure of the Greek labor market. On the one hand, there is better knowledge of the needs than before, though mapping is still insufficient. On the other hand, there is an inability to meet those needs, due to restrictions preventing the vacant jobs being matched with job seekers, and the skills required with the skills on offer in specific sectors. In addition, measures to stem or even reduce migration flows, as well as growing international competition for skilled labor, have led to a proportion of the domestic and [foreign workforce](#) being forced to leave the country. For many, the prohibitive cost of living and the housing crisis were also factors that triggered migration to locations with lower costs and/or higher earnings.

Amidst an effort to become an attractive destination for labor migrants, Greece retains the dual and rather contradictory approach of seeking to reduce and prevent irregular migration while attempting to attract foreign migrant labor for specific sectors and durations. A [new migration code came into effect in Greece on 1 January 2024](#). The new code amends various legal provisions of the previous Migration and Social Integration Code (Law 4251/2014), while bringing together other laws. Its key innovation is its provision for a "long-term residence permit", which grants its holder the possibility of moving to, and working in, every EU member state. As regards the invitation of foreign workers, it retains the reforms of Law 4251/2014 (GG A' 80) "Immigration and Social Integration Code and other provisions" as incorporated in [Law 4825/2021](#) pertaining to *metaklisi*.

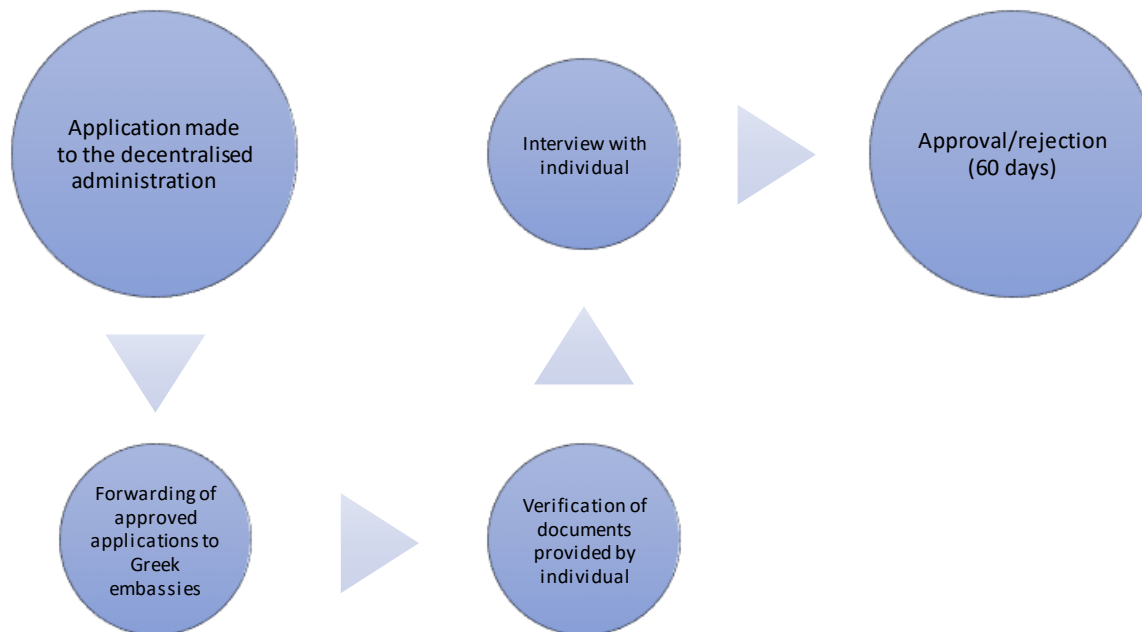
With regard to the latter, once the available quotas are released, employers submit their applications to the decentralized administration. Applications must include:

- full details of the third-country nationals to be employed.
- their specialty
- the duration of their employment
- a fee of EUR 100 per period of employment per worker
- a sworn declaration to pay the costs envisaged.
- a valid employment contract with provision for insurance

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- evidence that the person fulfills the conditions for the recognition of their professional qualifications, if he/she intends to practice a regulated profession in Greece.
- evidence that suitable accommodation will be provided for the worker or evidence that the seasonal worker has their own accommodation and that this accords with the required specifications<sup>14</sup>
- a photocopy of the passport of the third-country national
- birth and family certificates.

Provided the application is approved by the regions, the file is forwarded to the Greek embassies/consulates for verification, the interview of the individual, and the approval or rejection of the request.



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<sup>14</sup>Employers who invite third-country nationals for seasonal work in the agricultural and stock raising sector must provide the employee with suitable accommodation that meets the required health and safety standards. If the seasonal worker is required to pay rent, the employer shall provide the seasonal worker with a rental agreement or equivalent document that clearly states the terms of the rental. When the accommodation is not provided by the employer, the employer must provide the competent agency of the Decentralized Administration with proof that the seasonal worker has their own accommodation which meets the standards required by law as mentioned above.



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In principle, workers can be invited to the country under three distinct categories of labor: highly skilled (EU Blue Card), dependent labor (skilled or unskilled), and seasonal work (6-month duration).

According to the Hellenic Ministry of Labor, the total number of residence visas quotas per region for third-country nationals for the years 2023 and 2024 was 167,925.

Region	Number of permits	Distribution for seasonal labor	Distribution for dependent employment / temporary work
Attiki	10,236	4,700	4,746
South Aegean	830	560	134
North Aegean	6,528	5,115	1,013
Peloponnese	14,850	10,650	3,850
Central Macedonia	44,265	35,350	8,115
Eastern Macedonia & Thrace	4,764	1,630	2,444
Western Macedonia	7,575	6,200	1,250
Thessaly	14,817	9,335	5,082
Epirus	7,920	4,375	3,245
Central Greece	5,844	4,050	794
Western Greece	11,720	10,400	1,320
Ionian	3,836	2,950	716
Crete	14,740	7,030	7,460

Source: [Ministerial Decision 1314 07-03-2023](#)

Over and above the positions that were announced in 2023 and only partially filled, in April 2023 [a new Ministerial Decision](#) was issued, adding another 32,517 places. Though a significant increase, it still fell short of the applications for 380,000 places submitted by the regions. Thus, while the Ministry for Labor stresses, for example, that the quota for foreign workers in the hospitality sector has increased to 9,261 up from 2,811 over the previous two years, it is still far below the 80,316 places requested by employers. However, the reduced quotas reflect the Ministry's intent to meet the need for labor through the employment of those registered in the unemployment offices.

The quotas for foreign workers consequently target primarily sectors where there is no interest from Greek workers. The Ministerial Decision also allowed for the distribution of positions in regions rather than regional units, allowing for a greater geographical dispersal. It also allowed for employment in more

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than one occupation by grouping specializations (for example, agricultural workers, farm workers, laborers, etc.) rather than specific posts.

Of the available posts, **20,000 are expected to be filled through the bilateral agreements** signed between Greece and Egypt and Greece and Bangladesh (see the section on bilateral agreements). The remaining places will be filled through the regular *metaklisi* procedure. Looking at the breakdown provided in the Ministerial Decision (MD), two things need to be highlighted:

1. First, the Greek state is allocating limited quotas for highly skilled workers, which is also likely a reflection of the limited demand. Just 505 places in total were allocated for 2023–2024, of which 200 are for the Region of Attica.
2. Second, unskilled or low skilled labor places make up the bulk of the positions, and of those approximately 86,000 places are allocated for seasonal work (16,572 for dependent employment of 12-months duration and 5,265 places for Egyptian fishermen for a maximum of 11 months annually). In the primary sector, there is estimated to be a shortfall of [70,000 workers](#) in agriculture alone. Additional needs exist in the hospitality industry. And while the cap on the accommodation and catering sectors has been increased (to 9,261, up from 2,811 over the previous two years), it is still significantly lower than the 80,316 workers requested. Here too, both the labor supply and the domestic labor force's ability to fill the vacancies were taken into account, though it remains to be seen how effective this is as a strategy. Nonetheless, the overall quota set is below the labor market requirements, as estimated by employers; we shall have to wait and see how effective the *metaklisi* is in its current form at addressing labor market needs.

Given the demand for labor, agreements with third countries providing for labor mobility can clearly contribute to addressing the needs of the market. However, they have proved hard to implement.

## Bilateral labor agreements

Bilateral labor agreements are an old and well-documented tool in the migration diplomacy toolbox<sup>15</sup> available to both sending and receiving states. They are also useful instruments for guaranteeing the protection of migrant rights, particularly when drawing on existing international instruments to embed a normative foundation into the agreement. These range from UN universal human rights instruments and core ILO Conventions to migrant-worker-specific instruments and all other labor standards.

Agreements focusing on labor mobility are part of the broader migration diplomacy of many countries in Asia, Africa and—increasingly—Europe. For sending countries, they function as a way of alleviating demographic and unemployment pressures, while ensuring their citizens' rights are protected. For receiving countries, they serve as a legal pathway for labor migrants, while simultaneously guaranteeing that the countries of origin will accept the return of their citizens once their residence permits expire.

There is no standard type of agreement, and their substance can range from establishing pathways to move a specific number of a certain kind of workers from one country to another (as in the case of the Greece-Egypt agreement) to setting out guidelines to regulate every worker moving between the two countries in question. Most focus on either temporary or seasonal workers, though there have been bilateral agreements regulating *inter alia* the exchange of traineeships, social security cooperation, and technical cooperation in the context of specific projects that include a temporary exchange of people. The focus of Greece's agreements has been on seasonal work.

### The MoU with Bangladesh

Bangladesh is a country that has invested in emigration as a development strategy. The government has set an ambitious target [of earning a cumulative \\$150 billion through remittances](#) as part of its Eighth Five-Year Plan (running from mid-2020 to mid-2025). It has been critical in improving, through remittances, the standard of living and social status of residents in Bangladesh. Stakeholders estimate that 12,000,000 Bangladeshis are overseas, many on seasonal work contracts registered with their government, while an unknown number also take unofficial overseas jobs.

To facilitate recruitment and emigration, as well as prevent exploitation and trafficking, Bangladesh has established 1,500 recruitment agencies that are licensed and monitored by the state. They are responsible for undertaking the recruitment of workers based on demand, and also undertake the initial interview. Bangladeshi diplomatic missions have also sought to ensure access to channels through which migrants can seek protection and assistance.

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<sup>15</sup> For a review of Bilateral Labor Agreements, see Chilton, A., Woda, B. (2022). The expanding universe of bilateral labor agreements. *Theoretical Inquiries in Law*, 23 (2), pp. 1-64. <https://doi.org/10.1515/til-2022-0010>  
For Egypt, see Gerasimos Tsourapas, G. (2022). Migration and Development in Egypt—A Holistic View. *International Development Policy | Revue internationale de politique de développement*, 14. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/poldev.4803>; for Bangladesh, see Barkat, A., Osman, A., Ahmed S.A., Osman, A., Suhrawardy, G.M., Sengupta, S.K., & Badiuzzaman, M. (2017) [Bangladesh National Strategy and Action Plan on Migration and Development and Monitoring and Evaluation Framework](#). Dhaka: Human Development Research Center.



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In February 2022, the governments of the Hellenic Republic and the People's Republic of Bangladesh signed the **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on migration and mobility**. The MoU was ratified in Greece by Law 4959/2022 in July 2022. The bilateral agreement sets out the conditions of entry and temporary residence for Bangladeshi nationals for the purpose of temporary employment, in line also with the 2017 EU-Bangladesh Agreement. In other words, the memorandum covers seasonal labor needs exclusively.

Greece has long been a country of reception for Bangladeshi migrants<sup>16</sup>. According to stakeholders, there were an estimated 45,000 Bangladeshis in Greece in 2023, of whom roughly 15,000 had legal residence permits (outside of the recent regularization process). Another 5,000 workers are estimated to have left in 2021 through the Western Balkan route, opting to move to Italy and Portugal, which were adopting short-term regularization programs at the time to address labor shortages in key sectors of the economy. With a growing diaspora, the MoU with Bangladesh is a natural progression in the context of burgeoning bilateral relations.

The agreement has **three key elements**: firstly, it guarantees that Bangladesh will facilitate the return of its citizens.

Secondly, through *metaklisi*, it allocates 4,000 temporary five-year residence permits, to be granted annually, of five-year duration. Upon conclusion of the 5-year period, the holders will need to return to Bangladesh.

Thirdly, and in an effort to address existing labor shortages, the memorandum allows for up to 15,000 Bangladeshis already residing undocumented in Greece to be granted a temporary long-term seasonal visa (five-year residence permit) to access seasonal work (9 months per year) and to return home when the five years have elapsed. The visa is only valid for Greece and does not allow the holder to work in other EU member states.<sup>17</sup>

The implementation of the second component—*metaklisi*—is our focus here. Stakeholders have highlighted that, in practice, the MoU was not implemented despite workers being available on the Bangladeshi side. Aside from several issues that are common across all types of *metaklisi*, in the case of Bangladesh specifically, there was the added issue of consular services.

The final decision on whether a visa will be issued or not rests with the competent Greek embassy and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Greece does not have consular service in Bangladesh, which means anyone interested in applying for the visa would need to travel to India.

The embassy examines the file forwarded by the decentralized administration in Greece and, in principle, asks the applicant for an in-person interview. The in-person interview poses several additional challenges.

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<sup>16</sup> Fouskas, T. (2012). Low-Status Work and Decollectivization: The Case of Bangladeshis in Athens. *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*, 10(1), 54–73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15562948.2012.646230>; Minamide, K. (2021). *The temporariness of Bangladeshi migration in Greece*. *Migration Letters*, 18(1), pp. 61-71. <https://doi.org/10.33182/ml.v18i1.1139>

<sup>17</sup> The scheme is outside the scope of the present report however for a condensed reaction

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1. Firstly, it severely increases the cost for the applicants, who often live in rural centers and have to cover travel and accommodation costs to reach whichever urban center (usually the capital) the Greek embassy is in. This is not a cost that everybody can afford to incur, especially when the result is unknown. It is even more expensive and complex in the case of Bangladesh, since there is no Greek embassy or consulate in the country. Instead, the Greek embassy in New Delhi is responsible for all Bangladeshi applications. This increases the complexity still further, since Bangladeshi citizens need a visa to travel to India, with only 6,000 visas issued per day.
2. Secondly, the Greek embassy in New Delhi covers Bangladesh, India and Bhutan--with India being the main priority. Under-staffed, it has been unable to respond to the applications, resulting in a backlog. Stakeholders have noted that people who applied in April 2023 had yet to receive a call for an interview by March 2024. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has expressed an interest in opening an embassy in Dhaka, and has contracted [Global Visa Center World](#) to open an office in the Bangladeshi capital and collaborate in the visa application procedure. Nonetheless, without a major staff increase and simplification of procedures, it is unlikely that the process will drastically change.
3. Thirdly, stakeholders suggested that the problem goes beyond staff shortages and there is a general hesitancy in issuing visas to seasonal workers from Bangladesh, Pakistan and other countries, rooted in concerns they will not remain in Greece but leave for another EU country, instead. In most cases, applications are rejected after the interview, often with no justification provided.

## The Agreement with Egypt

The agreement between Greece and Egypt was signed in Cairo on 22 November 2022. The agreement sets out the conditions for the entry and residence of 5,000 Egyptian citizens in Greece for the purpose of their employment in the agricultural sector. The agreement with Egypt has been viewed in a very different light from the MoU with Bangladesh.

Egypt is a country with which Greece has a long-standing collaboration vis-a-vis seasonal employment in the fisheries sector. It is also a priority country for Greece in terms of foreign policy issues as well as of irregular migration. This renders the agreement on seasonal migration part of a larger diplomatic puzzle that seeks to build on and improve the existing relationship between the two countries<sup>18</sup>.

Like Bangladesh, Egypt utilizes migration as a development strategy. The literature has shown how Egypt liberalized its emigration policy in the past, to address overpopulation and high unemployment rates. International migration is also a source of much needed remittances. At the macro level, remittances inject the foreign exchange into Egypt's balance on current account needed to close the chronic deficit in its balance of trade. In 2019, remittances sent to Egypt by its migrant workers around the world amounted

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<sup>18</sup> Hellenic Parliament minutes period IH' (Βουλή των Ελλήνων περίοδος IH' - Σύνοδος Δ', [Διαρκής επιτροπή εθνικής άμυνας και εξωτερικών υποθέσεων πρακτικό](#) (άρθρο 40 παρ. 1 κ.τ.β.)

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to \$26.8 billion (World Bank, 2020). This suggests migration is a strategy for the development, but also the survival, of the Egyptian economy.

A bilateral agreement for labor in fisheries was signed in 1981 and eventually voted into law in the Hellenic Parliament in 1984. Egyptians are invited through *metaklisi* to work in the fisheries (seasonal labor), while it is also common to employ Egyptians who have a residence permit in Greece for seasonal labor in the fisheries sector. In response to a recent parliamentary question on the issuance rate for Egyptian fishermen, the [Minister for Foreign Affairs noted that](#): "In 2023, 1,495 applications were submitted by Egypt, of which 1,373 were completed", while "in 2024 to date, 875 applications have been made with only 85 rejections".

The agreement with Egypt does not focus on fisheries, but rather lays out the conditions for the recruitment of **5,000 seasonal workers in the agricultural sector**.

There are three unique elements in the agreement with Egypt.

1. Firstly, it caps permits at a level many consider to be far below the actual needs of the Greek agricultural sector. According to the former Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, the low cap serves two purposes: it allows the Greek side to see how the agreement works in practice, and it prevents Greece relying exclusively on one country for its labor needs<sup>19</sup>.
2. Secondly, the screening and choice of Egyptian migrants is done by the Egyptian state alone. The list is then forwarded to the Greek consular authorities for the visa issuance. In accordance with this agreement, the Egyptian Government will be responsible for finding workers in Egypt, while the Greek side will specify in writing the type of agricultural production for which it is requesting workers. Key objections to this process have been that employers have no knowledge of, or choice over, who comes to work for them, nor, indeed, if they will have the appropriate skills. Though these are reasonable concerns, in reality, the absence of Greek (or licensed) labor offices in various countries means that the entire *metaklisi* process has relied until now on personal contacts rather than objective hiring processes. The transfer of the screening and checks to the Egyptian authorities relieves the Greek consulate of additional tasks, and shifts the responsibility for the appropriate selection of labor migrants onto Egypt.
3. Finally, the employees will be available for the Greek territory as a whole, establishing a common pool of workers for employers to select from and apply for *metaklisi*. This is new and a positive step that allows workers to be distributed across the country in a more streamlined manner.

In the agreement, the Greek consular authorities commit to approve a visa within 30 days of the submission of the required documents. Bilateral exchanges between stakeholders are also built into the agreement to ensure its smooth implementation.

The former Greek Migration and Asylum Minister, Mr Kairidis, announced in early June 2024 that the first list of [2,400 eligible Egyptian seasonal workers had already been drawn up](#), in collaboration with the

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<sup>19</sup> Hellenic Parliament minutes period IH' (Βουλή των Ελλήνων περίοδος IH' - Σύνοδος Δ', [Διαρκής επιτροπή εθνικής άμυνας και εξωτερικών υποθέσεων πρακτικό](#) (άρθρο 40 παρ. 1 κ.τ.β.)



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Egyptian Ministry of Labor. The timeline for implementation and the outcomes of the agreement remains to be seen. For example, some stakeholders have expressed concern that the Egyptians may not necessarily have the skills required for certain tasks in the agricultural sector, which would limit the number of workers willing to come or require the provision of some form of on-the-job training.

Neither the Egyptian nor the Bangladeshi agreement allows for families to join the workers--further evidence that Greece approaches labor recruitment as a temporary form of migration, without investing in integration and skills development.

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## Current challenges in attracting foreign workers

Aside from specific issues like the lack of consular services in Bangladesh, there are also a range of challenges and issues that are prevalent throughout the *metaklisi* process, including bilateral implementation.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Needs assessment</b></p> <p>There is a significant gap between the needs put forth by the different associations and the biannual quotas. For example the National Union of Agricultural Cooperatives argues that for 2023, the number of requests submitted for seasonal labor for agricultural and stock raising was in the region of <u>380,000</u>. If that is the case, the current quotas are insufficient to address labor demands; what is missing is a detailed mapping not only of the requirements, but also the skills needed.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Duration of decision</b></p> <p>There is no uniformity in how long the decentralized administration will take to process the application.</p> <p>In Attika, it does not usually exceed one month, but in other locations it can take as long as 8 months, in which case the <i>metaklisi</i> is unlikely to go ahead that year. This means that certain regions end up being disadvantaged, mainly due to a shortage of staff at the decentralized administration.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Recruitment</b></p> <p>Greece does not collaborate with either licensed or state-owned recruitment agencies, and prospective employers do not have access to the lists established by the Bangladeshi agencies. Consequently, when recruitment takes place, it is either done through word of mouth, via a friend or family member of someone who is already living in Greece or increasingly, by prospective employers turning to intermediaries who can introduce them to workers in their country of origin (usually through their own extended social networks).</p> <p>The intermediaries then provide the necessary documents/information for the employer to submit the application to the decentralized administration. However, this does not mean that the two parties know each other, or that they have interacted, even remotely. Usually, it simply means their name and info have been given to the employer, so they can register a formal application for them.</p> <p>This means that recruitment takes place based on personal connections than skills, or via an interview process designed to identify the best applicant. It also leaves the worker open to exploitation by less scrupulous employers and/or intermediaries.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Housing for seasonal labor</b></p> <p>Housing is a crucial issue in labor recruitment, and especially in the case of seasonal labor. In many countries, including the Netherlands and Germany, employers provide workers with housing, sometimes at no cost, which makes the jobs they offer more attractive. Though Greek legislation requires accommodation to be provided for the worker, in practice this either does not happen or the quality of accommodation is poor. The decentralized administration is responsible for ensuring proper accommodation is provided, but their involvement does not generally extend beyond checking whether an address/contract has been provided.</p> <p>Some stakeholders have noted that the same address often appears to be registered to several people, and that no quality checks are performed on the accommodation provided. This has resulted in cases where individuals brought over have quickly returned home, either due to an absence of housing or to poor conditions. While this is not the most common outcome, as the competition for labor increases, people will have more options when choosing where to migrate to, and the migration conditions will be critical to their choice.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Duration of work</b></p> <p>Employers need to be able to guarantee employees a sufficient period of work. Several stakeholders have noted that this is not possible now, since it is unlikely the migrant will be able to work for nine consecutive months—especially doing seasonal work in agriculture. In practice this means reduced income. Given that many migrant workers pay a percentage of their earnings to the labor office/company that facilitated their recruitment, the travel costs etc. involved in contracts of just a few months duration will be unattractive for workers, with no guarantees that those who do sign up will return as competition for labor increases.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Duration of stay</b></p> <p>At the time of writing, it is not possible for a worker arriving through the <i>metaklisi</i> process to remain in the country after 9 months. This raises the cost and renders the country unattractive in comparison to other EU member states. More importantly it means some will attempt to leave from Greece and move to another EU member state where the possibility to acquire residence/work permit and other benefits is more likely.</p>

## Are bilateral agreements enough?

In February 2024, the Prime Minister of Greece announced that [the drafting of a bilateral agreement with India](#) to bring unskilled and skilled workers into the country to be employed in the agricultural, construction and tourism sectors was in its final stages. The agreement will form part of a broader opening up of the Greek market to foreign workers, with the government in negotiations for signing agreements with six countries in total: Armenia, Georgia and Moldova in Europe and India, the Philippines and Vietnam in Asia. The aim is partly diversification in the countries of origin themselves, to attract another 40,000 workers for seasonal and temporary employment. The choice of countries appears based partly on presence of Greek embassies and secondly on good working relationship.

The public discourse on these agreements, especially following the announcement of a potential agreement with Pakistan, has centered on whether Greece should be seeking to facilitate labor migration or to regularize the population already in the country instead. This issue was also brought up by several stakeholders, some of whom consider regularization a better way of moving forward, while others argue in favor of bilateral agreements. Though beyond the scope of the present paper, it is important to touch briefly on the regularization programs that are already up and running in Greece, because they show that--on their own-- they are unlikely to be able to address the current gaps in the labor market. There is also the question of what the Greek population would prefer.

The DiANEOsis 2024 survey on [What Greeks Believe—2024\(part B\)](#) shows that Greeks have mixed views on migration, but point to a broader consensus that labor migration is needed and beneficial to the economy. Seven out of ten respondents recognized that the outflow of migrants creates a problem for the economy in agriculture, tourism and services at home. A similar proportion point to the need for incentives and a culture of attracting workers to sectors where gaps exist. The survey also sought to document the prevalent prejudices and stereotypes about immigrants from different countries of origin. Immigrants from the Balkan countries garnered the most positive opinions (65.8%), perhaps because they are the ones with whom the local population is most familiar. They are followed by migrants from Latin or Central America (58.8%), Africa (51.9%) and Asia (50.4%). The highest percentage of negative opinions related to immigrants from Middle Eastern countries, with only four out of ten respondents viewing them positively. "This figure is in line with the negative connotations of the word 'Muslims'", notes the report, with 61.6% associating the term with something 'negative' rather than something 'positive' (31.3%).

A recent online survey conducted by [Sambanis & Kyrkopoulou](#) (February 2024) examined whether Greeks prefer regularization policies over bilateral agreements. Based on an online sample of 2000 participants, it appears that Greeks prefer regularization policies to bilateral labor agreements by a small margin. Specifically, 40% of the respondents supported BLAs, compared with 50% who supported regularization programs. To a degree, this is to be expected in the light of the DiANEOsis findings, where greater familiarity with certain nationalities appears to result in more positive sentiments. Fundamentally, regularization programs can legalize a migrant population that is already present in Greece and is familiar to Greeks, who may in many cases have employed them informally already.

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Greece has undertaken regularization programs in the past (1998-2007).<sup>20</sup> It is currently implementing two specific regularization programs aimed at maintaining part of the migrant workforce in the country.

### Temporary regularization for Bangladeshi nationals

One of the elements of the MoU with Bangladesh, is a form of **temporary regularization** that Greece had not undertaken since the early 2000s. The agreement establishes legal access to the labor market for seasonal work but requires an annual three-month return to Bangladesh and an eventual permanent return. In essence, the agreement transforms migrants who may have been in the country for years but without documents, into seasonal workers.

To qualify, applicants had to have a Bangladeshi passport valid for at least two years, proof that they were living in Greece before February 9 2022, and proof that they had a job (if they wanted to retain their legal status). Those wishing to take advantage of the opportunity were required to register at the Bangladesh Embassy in Athens first, before proceeding to apply online via the Greek government's website. According to [Infomigrants](#), a total of 10,337 irregular Bangladeshis applied for regularization in 2023 under the terms of the MoU.

Applied under MoU (as of Feb 2024)	Residence Permits (as of Feb 2024)	Cancelled applications*	Pending
10,450	3,405	1,009	5,910

\*These applicants can reapply if they meet certain criteria.

Though the expectation was that the applicants would exceed the 15,000 that were originally planned for, [multiple bureaucratic obstacles](#) have made the process difficult for those seeking to legalize their stay. Stakeholders have also highlighted that many work in jobs without a formal employer, as street vendors, flower sellers, etc., which restricts their ability to regularize their status. Proponents have argued that this marked the first concrete step towards ending the labor exploitation that is highly prevalent in the agriculture industry, as revealed in the ECtHR landmark judgment "[CHOWDHURY AND OTHERS vs GREECE](#)" (2017, the Manolada case). The five-year permit does not lead to residence status, access to citizenship or to integration. The workers do not have the right to bring their family to Greece, nor to remain beyond the five years foreseen by the agreement. The last two points were heavily emphasized following the announcement of the agreement, in an attempt to appease anti-immigrant sentiments. One of the main criticisms of this regularization is that it 'invests' in temporality rather than integration. However, considering the current political context, it is still a positive step towards both establishing legal access to the labor market and residence, and reducing worker exploitation.

<sup>20</sup> For a full analysis of regularization programs in Europe, see ICMDP. (2005). [Regime: Study on practices in the area of regularization of illegally staying third-country nationals in the Member States of the EU](#). Ref. JLS/B4/2007/05; Kanics, J., Coppari, P.R. (2021). [Regularization of Migrants in an Irregular Situation in the OSCE Region Recent Developments, Points for Discussion and Recommendations](#). OSCE.

## Limited regularization based on employment

A second form of regularization in a different format was codified in **Article 193 of Law 5078/2023**. The original estimate was that it would allow for the regularization of a significant number of migrants who were long-term residents in the country but had no residence permit. Such migrants may have entered Greece legally but failed to renew their permit, entered and remained undocumented, applied for regularization but were rejected (this category includes rejected asylum seekers), asylum applicants, and any other categories who were in the country without a permit at the time of application.

Article 193 of Law 5078/2023 established a new procedure for granting a residence permit, which provides access to paid employment, as well as for allowing third-country nationals to provide work or services, given that they:

- (a) hold an offer of employment from an employer in Greece or the commencement of a profession, for their employment under the status of dependent work or provision of services or work,
- b) were resident in Greece until 30 November 2023 and had completed at least three consecutive years of residence in Greece prior to the submission of the application, with their residence attested to by a public document of definite date,
- c) do not have a criminal record, hold valid personal documents, and meet a number of other requirements relating to public security.

The permit has a duration of three years and differs from the regularization provided for Bangladeshi workers in entitling third-country nationals to access another type of permit from those provided for in the Immigration Code after its expiration. With this status, they will be able to: a) stay in Greece with their families, as this type of permit covers both the spouse and underage family members of the holder, b) apply for naturalization in Greece, and/or c) travel to another EU member state.

The program allows applications to be submitted until 31 December 2024.

According to recent data from the [Ministry for Migration](#), between 9 February 2024 (the date the online platform was activated) and 1 March 2024, a total of 4,790 applications were submitted. Of those, 828 applicants had already received a temporary residence permit, with the remaining 3,952 applications under examination. It remains to be seen how many will end up regularizing their stay, though it is unlikely the number will be as high as 300,000.

The above suggest that regularization programs are needed but require also improvements. Yet, despite their limited scope and bureaucratic problems (including delays in implementation), they constitute positive steps towards allowing a portion of the migrant population to become visible and acquire documents with all the rights they confer. Often there is the misperception that they constitute a pull factor, however this suggests limited understanding of the 'make up' of irregular migration. Most irregular migrants are a result of gaps and limitations in visa regimes, and in many cases people shift between regular and irregular status. In other words, a regularization program in itself is unlikely to function as a pull factor for arrivals. It will however benefit the formal economy and facilitate the security and integration of people already resident in a country. More importantly, regularization programs in the EU entail safeguards, with an emphasis on the specified length of stay in the country, [which prevents them](#)



[acting as 'pull factors'](#). Nonetheless, they need to be well managed and offer [long-term prospects of future success](#) to applicants.

Regularizations are one instrument in the toolbox, but agreements with third countries can complement labor market needs while also functioning as a migration diplomacy tool—they can thus form part of broader foreign policy priorities with select countries. For Greece, this means that agreements need to be selected strategically, with improvements made both at the administrative level and to what is offered to workers, in skills recognition and transfer, and in the implementation of agreements.

## Policy Recommendations

There have been several proposals already from various stakeholders regarding the issue of attracting foreign labor to Greece and keeping the migrants here. There is a consensus that positive steps have been taken but are being hampered by the bureaucratic mechanisms as well as the Greek state's hesitancy in pressing ahead with a more robust legal migration policy. This is a direct result not only of the domestic political context, but also of the policy discourse that has presented migration in a negative light for years. Gradually, Greece will need to compete with countries like Spain and Germany, Italy and the Netherlands, to attract seasonal labor. It will need to move swiftly to ensure gaps in the labor market are filled--not only for this year or the next, but for the decade ahead. Several steps can be taken, including:

**Developing coherent and complementary policies on legal migration:** labor agreements and limited regularization programs do not, on their own, allow for the establishment of a cohesive and sustainable labor migration policy. As we enter an age in which competition for labor will increase, it is important to reform the legal framework to make the country attractive. We also need to offer long-term residence and integration if we wish to acquire a more permanent labor force. Currently, migration policy remains reactive. Forward scenarios are needed to identify growing needs which are not limited to agriculture or tourism. The gender dimension should also be incorporated, taking it into consideration that the current recruitment process tends to prioritize male migrants.

**Measuring labor market needs:** there is no precise quantitative measurement of the requirements, specialties (especially with regard to skilled migration), and geographical areas that recruitment from third countries needs to address. This is important in developing a holistic migration policy and was raised as an issue by all stakeholders. A fully digitized system visible in real time to both the respective ministries and agencies would allow for on-the-spot updates as well as facilitating the accurate recording of needs. Allowing regions to see the registered requirements would also facilitate the allocation of migrants and the sharing of quotas, given that a bill will soon be presented to parliament allowing third-country nationals under *metaklisi* to change employers while in Greece.

**Selecting partner countries strategically,** not only in relation to the 'ease' with which visas may be issued, but also in relation to the broader migration priorities of Greece (and returns, in particular) and to the skill-sets available in the countries. **Pakistan** is one of the countries that ticks both these boxes, and should therefore be a priority for Greek migration diplomacy.

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- The MoU with Bangladesh, for example, showed how legal migration can also facilitate cooperation on returns, a crucial issue in migration governance—an area in which the EU overall is currently underperforming. A similar agreement could be negotiated with Pakistan, which would also incorporate regularization for Pakistani migrants in Greece.
- The EU is proceeding with a Talent Partnership with Pakistan. Greece should seek to actively participate, even if it plays a minimal role, and should also actively engage the construction sector in the discussion, for both skills development and targeted circular labor migration programs.

**✚ India:**

- India is a country where progress has already been made towards an agreement. However, India is also a country that produces high-skilled migrants, particularly in the ICT sector. There is an opportunity there for Greece, and rather than focusing mostly on seasonal work in the agricultural sector, emphasis should be placed on attracting medium- and high-skilled ICT workers. The Netherlands' facilitation of skilled migration through a flexible labor market, allowing dependents to migrate and to work, has made the country attractive to Indian migrants working in the ICT sector and produced positive externalities in the wider sector. It is but one best practice worth considering.

**Involving private sector and labor groups:** increasing countries turn to multi-actor partnerships as regards labor migration. For example, in April 2024, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed by the labour groups of Sicily and Morocco – enabling Moroccan workers to undergo vocational training in country and once over to be eligible for seasonal employment in Sicily. Such smaller scale schemes are beneficial both for the workers (reduce significantly potential for exploitation) and the country of origin. Smaller scale trainings can be funded through the private sector to enable training and eventually seasonal labor in Greece.

**Involving civil society and employer federations/organizations** in developing and implementing BLAs. Several requests for adaptation have been incorporated into the law pending approval: for example, since it was observed that the provision requiring posted workers to return to their countries for three months per year is costly, and actually acts as a disincentive, the Ministry of Migration Policy is considering allowing workers to stay for 18 consecutive months before returning to their home countries for six. These are positive steps, but more is needed, particularly in addressing recruitment efforts and the types of skills that are needed. Here, partners like the [Economic and Social Council of Greece](#) have an important role to play in liaising with the different industries and mapping needs. In addition, civil society must become an active partner in the design and implementation of agreements. As human rights requirements are being mainstreamed in the business sector including agricultural policy, employers, associations and industry will need not only training but also advance information to be able to meet the standards required and remain competitive at attracting foreign workers. Civil society has a role to play here in the training, but also in the provision of information and monitoring.

**Recruitment:** Greece needs to become more proactive in the recruitment of labor. Limited investment options for developing an agency or offices abroad necessitates a more flexible approach. An online

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platform similar to the EU Talent Pool, but at the national level, would be an option, with openings and required skills posted and applicants able to submit their CVs online. Once the regions have approved the employers' declarations of needs, the latter would be given access to the CVs that match them. One of the key issues highlighted by stakeholders is their inability to conduct interviews with prospective workers; however, best practices exist that can be utilized for recruitment.

**Identify best practices:** There is a significant lack of information available on what best practices are implemented in Europe and beyond. For example, Malta offers online interviews, which allow employers to meet potential employees, while the Netherlands has established an online database for recruitment in the agricultural sector. Beyond access to CVs and job postings, the database offers information for job seekers and employers on what to take into account when working in the Netherlands (for the jobseeker) or hiring people from abroad (for the employer). The information is provided as text, images and video in different languages—hence making it accessible. More information and research are needed for Greece to identify which practices can be applied given the national context and capacities.

**Accommodation:** Accommodation is key and not easily addressed in relation to costs and available options. One solution would be for the various business associations to rent available accommodation for their members, and for the decentralized administration to take on additional staff to run checks on accommodation conditions. Minimum criteria should be established and made compulsory for employers. Rental costs could be covered through fees paid to the association by employers, who would thus no longer be directly responsible for finding appropriate housing; this would simultaneously ensure that certain criteria are met. For agricultural work, a solution would be to set up prefabricated houses (as in the Netherlands) that provide communal and individual spaces maintained by either the regional agricultural association or by individual farmers. Renovating and making use of existing building stock, existing public facilities and structures for suitable accommodation and living facilities should also be considered.

**Training centers:** Several countries including Spain, Germany and Japan have set up, or are setting up, training centers in those countries they will be emphasizing in their recruitment. The aim is to facilitate the acquisition of skills linked to specific employment sectors and often based on projected needs. Training centers offer certification, which also allows for skills recognition and transfer. It would be worth exploring Greece partnering with EU countries to co-develop the selective training of third-country nationals who could then be granted express residence and work permits for Greece and be rapidly absorbed into the labor market. This would be especially useful for specific sectors like construction, where similar needs are emerging across Europe as a result of the green transition.

**Virtual reception office**

Stakeholders suggested that the absence of any organized reception for those arriving to work here in Greece is an issue. Limited information is provided, and while in some cases the employer tries to accompany them on arrival to their place of residence and work, this is not often possible. One way to reduce costs, while offering information, would be to set up an online/virtual reception center. Upon receiving a visa, the migrant would download and register an application available in select languages; this app would contain all the information about his/her travel, duration of stay, employer (address, duration of contract, type of work etc.), accommodation address, travel options (particularly from Athens to rural areas), and any other relevant information. An online chat option would also allow for further inquiries, as well as the possibility of an embedded evaluation questionnaire providing feedback on levels

of satisfaction, potential issues that arose, and complaints that should trigger a response from the decentralized administration.

### **Skills development while in Greece**

Greece does not offer migrants the opportunity to acquire formal skills while in the country for seasonal labor. In other words, irrespective of what further expertise or know-how the migrant acquires, he/she will be unable to transfer to another country or back home, since there no formalized process in place for skills development and recognition. Incorporating this option into agreements with specific countries would increase the attraction factor while also enabling workers to cultivate their skills while in Greece, to the benefit of both themselves and their employers.

### **Intergovernmental structures**

Currently, too many ministries and decentralized administrations are involved in the process of recruiting third-country nationals. A legislative intervention has been discussed that would transfer responsibilities from the Ministry of the Interior and decentralized administrations to the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, but for this to work, a separate service with additional personnel would need to be set up within the Ministry tasked only with implementing BLAs and *metaklisi*. Utilizing existing staff would reduce the already restricted capacity of the Ministry. An intergovernmental task force set up to monitor implementation challenges as well as identify best practices and their potential transfer to the national context could facilitate collaboration between the ministries.