

primacenters

Primacenters' Framework

Greek Country Report

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Executive Summary

The PRIMACENTERS Greece Country Report highlights the indispensable role of migrant workers in sustaining the Greek agricultural sector, which accounts for 4% of GDP. Amidst an aging native workforce and rural depopulation, migrants form the backbone of agricultural labor, particularly in key regions like the Peloponnese and Crete. However, the sector is marked by profound informality, substandard housing, and restrictive administrative processes, such as the cumbersome "Metaklisi" permit system. To foster sustainable rural development, the report calls for the digitalization of permit procedures, enhanced enforcement by the Labor Inspectorate, and the expansion of community-based integration services, ensuring fair labor practices and social cohesion.

1.Introduction

Migration has emerged as a defining feature of Greece's socio-economic landscape, especially since the 1990s, when the country transitioned from being a sender of migrants to a significant receiver. In this context, the agricultural sector—a cornerstone of Greece's rural economy and national food security—has become increasingly reliant on migrant labor to meet production demands. As native populations age and rural depopulation accelerates, migrants have stepped into vital roles, sustaining industries ranging from greenhouse vegetable cultivation in Crete to strawberry harvesting in the Peloponnese. This report explores the intersection of migration and the primary agricultural sector in Greece. It examines how migrant workers contribute economically and socially to rural communities, often under precarious working and living conditions. The analysis draws on statistical data from national (ELSTAT, Ministry of Migration Policy) and international sources (OECD, Eurostat), qualitative insights from focus groups and interviews with migrants and local stakeholders, and case studies of landmark events such as the 2013 Nea Manolada shooting.

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Four key questions guide this investigation:

1. What roles do migrant workers play in Greece's primary sector and rural economies?
2. What are their working and living conditions?
3. How effective are Greece's legal and policy frameworks in regulating migration and protecting migrant workers?
4. What policy interventions could promote sustainable integration and fair labor practices?

By situating Greece within the broader European context of migration and rural labor markets, this report highlights both challenges and opportunities for creating inclusive, rights-based systems. It provides evidence-based recommendations aimed at policymakers, agricultural stakeholders, and civil society organizations engaged in migration governance and rural development.

2. Migration Overview in Greece

2.1 Historical Context

Greece's migration profile has undergone profound transformations over the past four decades. Historically a country of emigration, Greece saw millions of its citizens depart for destinations such as Germany, the United States, Canada, and Australia during the mid-20th century. However, the early 1990s marked a decisive turning point. Following the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Balkan wars, Greece became a primary destination for economic migrants from neighboring countries. Albanians, in particular, arrived in large numbers, taking up jobs in construction, agriculture, and domestic services.

By the early 2000s, Greece's immigrant population had diversified further to include significant numbers of Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Syrians, and Egyptians. This shift was driven by global migration trends, labor shortages in low-wage sectors, and Greece's geographical position as a gateway to the European Union. The refugee crisis of 2015-2016 further reshaped Greece's migration landscape, with over one million asylum seekers passing through the country en route

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to Northern Europe. While many continued onward, a substantial number remained in Greece under temporary or permanent protection statuses.

2.2 Demographic and Population Profile

As of early 2024, Greece's total population stands at approximately 10.4 million. Of this, an estimated 1.15 million people, about 11.3% of the population, are foreign-born. This includes both EU and non-EU nationals, though the latter comprises the majority of migrants engaged in agricultural work. Primary Origin Countries

Albania: Albanians remain the largest migrant group, making up 55–60% of Greece's foreign-born population. Many have resided in Greece for decades and now hold long-term or permanent residence permits.

- Pakistan & Bangladesh: Significant numbers of workers from these countries are engaged in agriculture, particularly in greenhouse cultivation and field harvesting.
- Syria & Afghanistan: Predominantly refugees who arrived during the 2015 crisis; some have transitioned into agricultural labor as asylum procedures delayed their entry into formal employment.
- Egypt: Recently re-emerged as a source country for seasonal agricultural labor under a bilateral agreement.

Age and Gender Structure

Most migrants working in agriculture are male and fall within the 20–49 age bracket. Female migrants, while present, tend to be concentrated in domestic care and service sectors. The gender imbalance in agricultural labor reflects both recruitment patterns and cultural factors in sending countries.

2.3 Migration Flows and Status

Legal Migration Channels

Greece's migration system includes several legal pathways:

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- Long-Term Residence Permits: For family reunification, work, or humanitarian protection.
- Seasonal Work Permits (Metaklisi): Allow employers to bring in workers for up to 6–9 months.
- Asylum and Humanitarian Protection: For refugees fleeing conflict and persecution.

In 2023 alone, Greece issued approximately 118,800 residence permits, of which 10% were for labor purposes. However, these numbers underrepresent the actual contribution of migrants to sectors like agriculture due to widespread informality.

More specifically regarding the pending applications for residence permits for May 2025, Greece had 293.035 in total and specifically the decentralized administration of "Peloponnese, Western Greece & Ionian" had 29.666 i.e. 10,12%. Furthermore, the initial licensing (2021-2025) for Greece was 366.523 in total, while the decentralised administration of "Peloponnese, Western Greece & Ionian" had 39.337, i.e. 10,73%. Finally, the renewals of licenses (2021-2025) for Greece totaled 635.287 while the decentralized administration of "Peloponnese, Western Greece & Ionian" had 69154 i.e. 10,88%.

2.4 Undocumented Migrants

A significant proportion of Greece's agricultural workforce lacks legal status. Estimates suggest tens of thousands of undocumented migrants fill critical roles in harvesting, planting, and livestock care. Employers often favor informal recruitment to avoid bureaucratic delays and associated costs of formal hiring.

The Greek government's 2023 legislative reform (Law 5078/2023) aims to address this by providing a regularization pathway for migrants who have resided in Greece for over three years and can present proof of employment. Early data indicate that around 19,600 migrants applied for regularization in 2024, with ~10,000 approvals granted by mid-year.

Seasonal Migration Programs

Bilateral agreements with countries like Egypt and Bangladesh have created formal seasonal labor migration pathways:

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- Egypt: Up to 5,000 seasonal workers annually for agriculture.
- Bangladesh: A quota of 4,000 seasonal workers plus 15,000 long-term residents for critical sectors. These agreements aim to mitigate labor shortages while reducing irregular migration. However, implementation challenges persist, including delays in permit processing and limited oversight of working conditions.

2.5 Drivers of Migration to Greece

Push Factors

- Economic hardship and unemployment in origin countries.
- Political instability and conflict (e.g., Syria, Afghanistan).
- Environmental degradation impacts livelihoods in South Asia and Africa. Pull Factors
- High demand for seasonal agricultural labor due to rural depopulation and aging Greek farmers.
- Greece's geographic proximity to Asia and Africa.
- Informal networks facilitate migration outside official channels.

2.6 Challenges and Trends Challenges

- Informality: A large proportion of migrant agricultural workers remain outside formal legal frameworks.
- Integration Barriers: Language, lack of access to healthcare, and limited housing options hamper social and economic integration.
- Policy Gaps: Delays in permit processing and limited enforcement of labor rights. Emerging Trends
- Increased use of bilateral agreements to regulate seasonal migration.
- Growing role of NGOs in filling gaps in integration services.
- Rising public debate over the role of migration in revitalizing rural communities.

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3.The Primary Sector in Greece:

Role & Structure

3.1 Overview of the Agricultural Sector

Agriculture has historically played a crucial role in Greece's economy, culture, and rural livelihoods. Although its contribution to GDP has declined in recent decades—reflecting broader trends in European economies, the sector remains vital for national food security and employment, particularly in rural areas.

As of 2024, agriculture accounts for approximately 4% of Greece's GDP and employs around 615,000 people, representing 12.4% of the total workforce. Compared to other EU member states, Greece has a higher proportion of its population engaged in agriculture, highlighting the sector's enduring importance for local economies.

Key agricultural outputs include:

Olives and Olive Oil: Greece is one of the world's top three producers of olive oil, with exports reaching global markets.
Citrus Fruits: Oranges and lemons are significant crops, especially in the Peloponnese.
Vegetables: Greenhouse-grown tomatoes, cucumbers, and peppers dominate in Crete and Thessaly.
Grapes and Wine Production: A traditional strength, with export potential.
Livestock: Sheep and goat farming remains important for cheese and meat production.

3.2 Structure of the Sector

Farm Sizes and Ownership The agricultural landscape in Greece is characterized by small family-owned farms. According to ELSTAT data, the average farm size is approximately 6.6 hectares—well below the EU average. Fragmentation of landholdings and inheritance practices have resulted in numerous small plots, limiting economies of scale and mechanization potential. Aging Farmer Population Rural depopulation and aging demographics exacerbate labor shortages.

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Nearly 50% of Greek farmers are over 60 years old. Younger generations increasingly migrate to urban centers or abroad, leaving a gap in both labor and farm succession planning.

3.3 Labor Dynamics in the Sector

Agriculture is highly labor-intensive, particularly during planting and harvest seasons. Mechanization levels remain low relative to other EU countries, especially for fruits and vegetables requiring manual picking. To meet labor demands, Greek farmers have turned increasingly to migrant workers. In some regions, non-EU migrants constitute up to 70% of the agricultural workforce.

This reliance is particularly acute for:

- Citrus fruit production in the Regional units of Argolida and Laconia: Argolida and Laconia are two of the most important regions in Greece for the production of citrus fruits, mainly oranges and mandarins. Argolida, with its fertile soil and mild climate, is the leading producer of oranges in Greece, covering a significant proportion of domestic needs and exports. In Laconia, orange and lemon cultivation is also extensive and contributes significantly to the local economy. The citrus fruit harvest requires high labour intensity, especially in the November-March period, which makes migrant workers necessary for the smooth running of production.
- Olive oil production in the Regional units of Messinia and Laconia: Messinia and Laconia are among the main pillars of Greek olive oil production. Messinia, with its focus on the Kalamon variety and the famous PDO Kalamata olive oil, contributes significantly to the export of high quality olive oil. In Laconia, the Athinolia variety dominates, with extra virgin olive oil being a key export product. The olive harvest, which takes place mainly from October to January, is particularly labour-intensive, as much of it is still carried out using traditional methods. The contribution of migrant workers is crucial to completing the harvest in these areas.
- Production of raisins and wines in the Regional unit of Corinthia: Corinthia stands out for the production of black currants (Currants), which is historically one of the main export products of Greece. At the same time, the vineyards of Corinthia make a significant contribution to wine production, with varieties such as Roditis and Moschofilero dominating the region. The harvesting of grapes for raisins and wine takes place mainly

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in the summer and autumn months and requires intensive manual labour. There is a heavy reliance on migrant workers, as the lack of local labour leads producers to rely on seasonal workers from abroad.

Strawberries in Nea Manolada (Peloponnese): Where large-scale greenhouses demand high seasonal labor inputs.

Greenhouse Vegetables in Crete: Year-round production requires a stable labor supply, often filled by migrants from Bangladesh and Pakistan.

Cotton in Thessaly: Harvesting remains labor-intensive and dependent on migrant workers.

3.4 Employer Perspectives

Agricultural cooperatives and individual farmers alike highlight the sector's dependence on foreign labor. Feedback from industry associations reveals:

- Chronic Labor Shortages: Even with existing migrant flows, farmers report difficulties filling seasonal positions, leading to unharvested crops and financial losses.
- Administrative Burdens: Complex and time-consuming processes for formal recruitment under the metaklisi system discourage employers from engaging with official channels.
- Cost Sensitivity: Employers often prefer informal hiring to avoid paying social security contributions and minimum wages mandated under formal contracts. These factors perpetuate informality and increase the vulnerability of migrant workers, while simultaneously undermining efforts to professionalize and modernize the sector.

3.5 Regional Variations

Certain regions of Greece are particularly dependent on migrant agricultural labor:

Peloponnese: The Peloponnese is one of the most dynamic and diverse agricultural centres in Greece. The fertile soil and the Mediterranean climate make the region ideal for a variety of crops that contribute significantly to both domestic consumption and exports. Dependence on seasonal migrant workers is particularly strong throughout the region. More specifically:

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Regional unit of Argolida: Argolida stands out for its extensive cultivation of citrus fruits, mainly oranges and mandarins. This region is the largest producer of oranges in Greece and harvests are concentrated in the winter months (November-March). Hundreds of migrant workers are employed seasonally for harvesting and sorting.

Regional unit of Laconia: Laconia combines high quality olive oil production and significant production of citrus fruits (mainly oranges and lemons). The Athinolia olive is the dominant variety and Laconia's olive oil is internationally recognised. The manual harvest, which lasts from October to January, requires intensive labour.

Regional unit of Messinia: Messinia is famous for its PDO Kalamata olive oil, which is exported worldwide. At the same time, the extensive olive groves of Kalamata provide high quality edible olives. The region is totally dependent on seasonal workers, especially during the harvest period.

Regional unit of Corinth: Corinthia is historically a centre of production of black raisins ("Corinthian"), which remains a key export product. At the same time, the vineyards of the region produce high quality wines with varieties such as Roditis and Moschofilero. Harvesting the grapes in summer and early autumn requires a high concentration of labour. Regional Unit of Arcadia: Arcadia, with its hilly terrain, has limited olive and vineyard cultivation, but also contributes to animal production, mainly sheep and goat farming, for the production of traditional cheeses.

- Crete: Greenhouse vegetable cultivation and olive harvests.
- Thessaly: Cotton fields and tobacco farming.

These “hotspots” often overlap with areas where NGOs and labor inspectors struggle to maintain oversight due to geographic isolation and resource constraints.

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4. Migrant Labor in Agriculture

4.1 Workforce Composition & Dynamics

Greece's agricultural labor force has become heavily reliant on migrants, especially from non-EU countries. Seasonal workers from nations such as Egypt, Bangladesh, and Pakistan fill essential roles in harvesting and greenhouse cultivation. Meanwhile, long-term migrants—particularly from Albania—occupy year-round positions in enduring agricultural sectors like livestock and permanent crops. Quantifying migrant presence, surveys across northern Greece, Crete, and the Peloponnese estimate that 50–70% of the seasonal workforce across specific crops consists of non-EU nationals. In Thessaly—for cotton and tomatoes—migrant labor may reach 60%, while Cyprus-like patterns emerge in Peloponnese strawberry fields. This reliance reflects broader trends across Southern Europe, yet Greece lacks institutional safeguards that characterize systems in countries like Spain. The region of the Peloponnese, Western Greece and the Ionian Sea is a key agricultural and productive centre of the country, with a strong dependence on migrant labour to meet seasonal needs. The geographical diversity and extensive olive, citrus and horticultural crops make the region vulnerable to the challenges of labour shortages and the management of legal migration. The decentralised administration of the Peloponnese, Western Greece and Ionian Islands recorded 39,337 initial residence permits and 69,154 renewals for the period 2021-2025. In addition, there were 29,666 applications pending in May 2025, representing a significant percentage of the country as a whole.

4.2 Recruitment Channels & Governance

Formal Pathways:

- The Egypt–Greece pilot initiated in 2022 introduced a structured recruitment channel for 5,000 agricultural workers annually. Hired through Egyptian recruitment agencies and contracted directly with Greek employers, participants receive legal work permits, defined contracts, and employer-provided housing for the season. Quota System (Metaklisi):
- Seasonal permits are managed biennially, with ~147,000 permits assigned between 2023–2025 across sectors. Though agriculture receives the largest share, red tape and

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processing delays limit usage. Employers report waiting months for approvals; delays often exceed the narrow 6–9-month planting and harvest cycle, forcing many to hire informally.

Informal Networks:

- Community brokers remain influential. Migrants arriving via irregular channels often rely on ethnic intermediaries to find work. These arrangements evade regulation, restrict access to labor rights, and leave workers legally exposed.

4.3 Working Conditions & Vulnerabilities

Long Hours & Wages:

- Many migrants work 10–12-hour days, six to seven days weekly, with minimal breaks. Despite Greece's legal minimum wage, informal arrangements commonly yield wages below minimum, with employers sometimes withholding or delaying payment until the season's end. Housing

Conditions:

- Workers are housed in a variety of inadequate setups: old greenhouses retrofitted as dorms, crowded trailers without plumbing, or improvised shelters near fields. Sanitation is frequently substandard, posing serious risks for disease transmission.

Occupational Health & Safety Hazards:

Lack of protective equipment exposes workers to agrochemicals, extreme temperatures, and risks of injury. Clinics report cases of heat stress, pesticide poisoning, and untreated wounds. Most seasonal workers lack AMKA and are thus excluded from national health insurance programs.

Exploitative Incidents:

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- The Nea Manolada shooting incident (2013) remains a notorious example: over 30 Bangladeshi workers were shot for demanding unpaid wages. Although criminal cases initially faltered, Greece was found in violation of human rights protections by the European Court of Human Rights, signaling systemic vulnerabilities and lax enforcement.

Legal Uncertainty & Fear:

- Undocumented status traps many migrants. Seasonal permit holders often fear non-renewal, deportation, or retaliation if they report labor abuses. Even those with papers can find their employment tied directly to their employers, discouraging contestation of exploitation.

4.4 Economic & Social Impact

Economic Viability:

- Migrant labor sustains Greece's competitiveness in agricultural exports. Without it, producers risk significant losses and reduced market share. Yet informality means the state foregoes social security contributions and tax revenue from these workers.

Remittances:

Migrant workers' surplus incomes are often sent home, supporting families and communities abroad. However, this outflow moderately constrains local rural spending, affecting demand in marginal economies.

Social Integration and Isolation:

- Migrant communities often cluster separately, based on shared origin or employer links. While this provides mutual support, it limits cultural exchange and can perpetuate xenophobic narratives in local media and political discourse.

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4.5 Comparative Insights & Challenges

Greece is not alone in its dependence on migrant agricultural work. Spain, Italy, and Cyprus face similar patterns. The challenges faced by migrants and refugees in Greece vary. The most common ones, as recorded by the Focus Groups and interviews conducted by the Project Team of the Region of Peloponnese, are the following:

- Difficulties in legal coverage
- Inability to access information about life in Greece
- Difficulty finding permanent housing
- Limited opportunities for social integration
- Language and difficulties accessing education
- Difficulties accessing free and public healthcare (those without a Social Security Number)
- Difficulties in accessing (legal) work and security
- Difficulty in finding stable and safe housing
- Difficulty in understanding bureaucratic procedures for necessary documents
- High reliance on informal recruitment.
- Limited employer accountability.
- Scarce oversight in remote areas.
- Absence of migrant cooperatives or collective bargaining.

Based on interviews and focus groups, it was found that in Greece, in certain cases, informal groups of migrants are created in which individuals already present in the country, and particularly in the specific working region, take on the role of informal mediators to find group accommodation, work, and assistance on other issues related to health and welfare.

Strong models in Spain (e.g., Huelva strawberry cooperatives) and Italy (AgriLabour program) demonstrate that structured partnerships involving labor inspections, employer certification, and cooperativism can significantly improve working conditions and reduce informality—yet there are no such legal, formal mechanisms in Greek agriculture.

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4.6 Toward Formalization & Sustainable Practices

1. Scale Formal Channels: Expand bilateral agreements beyond Egypt and Bangladesh to include India, Nepal, and Ukraine, increasing reliability and rights protections.
2. Permit Systems: Post digital application portals and introduce mobile permit units for rural areas.
3. Legal Enforcement: Deploy more inspectors, including mobile teams during peak harvests, and introduce whistleblowing mechanisms with protection for migrant reports.
4. Improve Housing Standards: Create guidelines for employer-provided housing with minimum standards for sanitation and safety.
5. Support Migrant Empowerment: Encourage cooperatives, language programs, and financial inclusion mechanisms, enabling migrants to gain agency.

5. Legal Framework & Policies

5.1 Overview of Greek Migration Law

Greece's legal framework governing migration and labor rights for foreign workers has evolved significantly over the past three decades. The cornerstone of migration governance is Law 4251/2014 (the Migration and Social Integration Code), which consolidates prior legislation and outlines procedures for entry, residence, and employment of third-country nationals. This law regulates long-term residency, family reunification, and seasonal employment while aligning with EU directives on migration and labor mobility. In 2023, Greece introduced significant reforms through Law 5078/2023, addressing the growing reliance on migrant workers in key sectors like agriculture. The reform aimed to streamline regularization pathways, expand seasonal migration quotas, and strengthen employer obligations regarding worker rights and housing. Despite these efforts, implementation challenges persist, particularly in rural areas where informality dominates labor relations.

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5.2 Seasonal Worker Quotas and Recruitment Systems

METAKLISI System

The primary mechanism for seasonal labor recruitment is the METAKLISI system, a state-administered process through which Greek employers request permits for foreign workers. Seasonal permits are valid for up to nine months and require employer sponsorship. For the 2023–2025 period, approximately 147,000 permits were allocated, with agriculture receiving the largest share. However, administrative inefficiencies undermine the system's effectiveness. Employers report long processing delays, often exceeding the tight agricultural production cycles, leading many to resort to informal hiring practices.

Bilateral Agreements To address labor shortages and improve migration management, Greece has signed bilateral agreements with key labor-sending countries:

- Egypt–Greece Agreement (2022): Allows for the recruitment of up to 5,000 seasonal agricultural workers annually, formalizing a long-standing informal labor flow. Workers receive contracts covering wages, housing, and healthcare, though monitoring compliance remains a challenge.
- Bangladesh–Greece Agreement (2023): Establishes quotas for 4,000 seasonal workers and 15,000 long-term residents in critical sectors. The agreement is hailed as a step forward but criticized for insufficient provisions on rights protections and integration support.

These agreements are significant in reducing irregular migration but require robust enforcement to prevent exploitation.

5.3 Regularization Pathways for Undocumented Migrants

Greece faces a substantial population of undocumented migrants, many of whom have resided in the country for years and are employed in sectors such as agriculture. Law 5078/2023 introduced a regularization mechanism for migrants who:

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- Have resided in Greece for at least three years continuously.
- Can present a valid employment contract from a registered employer.

By mid-2024, approximately 19,600 applications had been submitted under this scheme, with around 10,000 approvals granted. NGOs report that while the scheme provides hope for thousands of workers, many remain excluded due to employers' reluctance to formalize their workforce and the bureaucratic burden of applications.

5.4 Enforcement and Monitoring Challenges

Despite progressive reforms, gaps in enforcement severely limit their impact. The Labor Inspectorate (SEPE) faces chronic underfunding and staffing shortages, leaving rural areas largely unmonitored. As a result:

- Employers rarely face penalties for non-compliance with wage or housing regulations.
- Migrant workers hesitate to report abuses for fear of retaliation or deportation, particularly when their residency status depends on employer sponsorship. NGOs and trade unions play an important role in advocating for migrant workers' rights but lack the institutional power to enforce change.

5.5 Alignment with EU Law and Policy

As an EU and Schengen member, Greece aligns with European migration frameworks, including the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum and the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). However, national implementation often lags behind EU standards. Co-financed projects under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) have improved urban integration services but remain insufficient in rural areas where agricultural workers are concentrated.

5.6 Opportunities for Reform

Feedback from participants in the Focus Groups and Interviews highlights several key priorities for strengthening Greece's legal, labor, and social integration framework, particularly for migrant and seasonal workers:

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1. Digitalization of Permit Processes Streamline and modernize the permitting system to reduce delays and improve efficiency, while making it easier for employers to remain compliant.
2. Enhanced Labor Inspections Increase funding and capacity for SEPE (Labor Inspectorate), including the deployment of mobile units focused on sectors and regions with high risks of exploitation, especially in agriculture.
3. Worker-Centered Permit Policies Transition away from employer-tied permits toward more flexible residency and work authorization models that prioritize worker agency and mobility.
4. Inclusive Integration Measures Expand AMIF-funded language and vocational training programs to reach rural areas, ensuring seasonal workers have access to essential integration services.
5. Improved Access to Rights and Information Ensure workers can easily access clear, multilingual information about their labor rights and obligations through digital and community-based channels.
6. Affordable Legal Support Provide easier and ideally free access to legal advice and representation on labor-related issues, especially for vulnerable workers.
7. Support for Workers' Associations Facilitate the creation and operation of migrant and seasonal workers' associations to strengthen collective voice and representation.
8. Simplified Access to Legal Documentation Remove barriers to obtaining legal documents necessary for employment, thereby reducing reliance on undeclared or informal work.
9. Expanded Educational Opportunities Promote access to education and credentialing (e.g. diplomas, certificates), which are key to long-term labor market mobility and access to better employment opportunities.

These reforms aim to enhance protection, autonomy, and long-term opportunities for migrant workers in Greece. The reform proposals that came out of the focus groups and interviews reflect the need for a fairer, more efficient, and more humane system of integration and labor protection in Greece. The country has significant opportunities to strengthen its legal and institutional framework through targeted interventions: digitizing procedures, strengthening controls, providing meaningful legal and educational support, and shifting to a more human-centered model of labor mobility.

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These policies can help boost social inclusion, reduce undeclared work, and make sure thousands of workers, especially those in vulnerable positions, like seasonal migrants—have better prospects. This is an opportunity to improve both working conditions and social cohesion in the country.

6.Integration Context & Challenges

6.1 Employment & Skills Mismatch

Migrants are integral to Greece's agricultural sector, yet their participation is overwhelmingly concentrated in low-skilled, precarious positions. Data from Eurostat (2023) reveals that approximately 70% of non-EU migrants holding tertiary education degrees are employed in roles for which they are overqualified, reflecting systemic barriers to skill recognition and mobility. Seasonal migrant workers, in particular, face constraints that preclude access to upskilling opportunities. Their short-term permits tether them to specific employers and regions, effectively excluding them from vocational training or labor market integration programs. This "locked-in" status perpetuates cycles of informality and exploitation. Language barriers compound these challenges. Limited Greek language proficiency hinders migrants' ability to navigate bureaucratic systems, engage with local communities, or transition into alternative sectors.

6.2 Housing and Living Conditions

Housing is one of the most pressing challenges for migrant farmworkers in Greece. Focus group findings and NGO reports consistently document substandard living conditions:

- Many workers reside in makeshift accommodations such as converted greenhouses, shipping containers, or overcrowded barracks near work sites.
- Basic amenities—running water, sanitation, electricity—are often absent or inadequate.
- Housing is typically provided by employers, creating dependency relationships that discourage workers from speaking out about poor conditions.

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These living arrangements expose workers to health risks including respiratory issues, skin infections, and vulnerability to extreme temperatures. In summer, temperatures in plastic greenhouses used as dormitories often exceed 40°C.

6.3 Healthcare Access

Migrant workers face significant barriers in accessing Greece's public healthcare system. The absence of AMKA (social security registration) among many seasonal migrants excludes them from state healthcare. Even those with AMKA struggle with:

- Language barriers during medical consultations.
- Long travel distances to rural clinics.
- Limited staffing in public health facilities in remote areas.

NGOs and mobile health units partially fill the gap, offering basic care and referrals. However, these services are fragmented and underfunded, leaving most migrants without consistent medical support.

6.4 Social Integration and Community Relations

Social integration of migrant agricultural workers is minimal. Seasonal migration patterns limit opportunities for migrants to establish long-term community ties. Many live and work in isolated rural areas, with little interaction outside their ethnic networks.

Community relations in rural Greece vary:

- Positive Dynamics: In areas where migrants have maintained a long-term presence, locals often acknowledge their economic contributions. Some villages in depopulating regions view migrants as essential for sustaining local services and economies.
- Tensions and Xenophobia: In regions experiencing sudden migrant influxes or economic strain, cultural misunderstandings and competition for limited resources (e.g., housing, healthcare) have fueled anti-migrant sentiments. Far-right political narratives have exacerbated these tensions in some areas.

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NGO-led programs such as SolidarityNow and ARSIS community centers have successfully promoted intercultural understanding through language classes, legal aid, and community events, but their reach remains limited to specific urban centers. Rural areas, where migrants are most concentrated, are underserved.

6.5 Gender and Vulnerable Groups

Female migrants in Greece are predominantly employed in domestic work and caregiving rather than agriculture. However, those engaged in farm labor often face heightened vulnerabilities:

- Wage theft and sexual harassment.
- Lack of gender-sensitive healthcare and support services.
- Limited childcare options, especially for mothers working long hours in the fields.

Other vulnerable groups include unaccompanied minors and asylum seekers working informally in agriculture to survive while awaiting asylum decisions. These groups are at heightened risk of trafficking and exploitation.

6.6 Key Barriers to Integration

The primary barriers to integration for agricultural migrant workers include:

1. Legal Precarity: Seasonal permits do not confer long-term security, leaving workers vulnerable to deportation and discouraging participation in integration programs.
2. Employer Dependence: Work permits tied to specific employers limit freedom of movement and bargaining power.
3. Lack of Institutional Support: Most integration initiatives are urban-focused, leaving rural migrant populations without access to language training, legal aid, or vocational programs.
4. Cultural and Linguistic Gaps: Limited interaction between migrants and local communities hinders mutual understanding and social cohesion.

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7.Case Studies & Field Insights

7.1 Egypt–Greece Seasonal Migration Pilot

The Egypt–Greece Seasonal Migration Pilot, launched in 2022, represents a significant shift toward formalizing seasonal labor migration in Greece's agricultural sector. Under the bilateral agreement, up to 5,000 Egyptian workers are recruited annually to meet seasonal labor demands, particularly in olive and citrus harvesting in Crete and the Peloponnese.

Strengths:

- Predictability and Structure: The program created a clear legal pathway for employers and workers, reducing reliance on informal brokers and irregular migration.
- Worker Protections: Contracts outline wages, housing provisions, and healthcare coverage, aligning with international labor standards.
- Economic Benefits: Employers report higher productivity due to a reliable workforce, while workers send remittances home, supporting families and communities in Egypt.

Challenges:

- Administrative Delays: Slow processing of work permits often results in workers arriving after peak harvest periods, undermining program goals.
- Cultural and Language Barriers: Limited cultural orientation and language support have led to misunderstandings between employers and workers.
- Housing Standards: Monitoring of employer-provided housing remains inconsistent, with NGOs reporting cases of substandard accommodation.

Despite these challenges, the pilot is widely viewed as a step forward in creating regulated migration channels and is cited as a potential model for agreements with other countries such as India and Nepal.

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7.2 Nea Manolada Incident (2013)

Perhaps the most infamous case highlighting the exploitation of migrant agricultural workers in Greece occurred in Nea Manolada, a major strawberry-producing region in the Peloponnese. In April 2013, more than 30 Bangladeshi workers were shot at and injured by farm supervisors when they protested months of unpaid wages. The incident drew international condemnation, with media outlets dubbing it the “Greek strawberry scandal.”

Legal Outcomes:

- Greek courts initially acquitted the farm managers, sparking outrage among human rights organizations and the European public.
- In 2017, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled against Greece in the case Chowdury and Others v. Greece, finding violations of Article 4 of the European Convention on Human Rights (prohibition of forced labor). Greece was ordered to pay €588,000 in compensation to the victims.

Lessons Learned:

The Manolada case has highlighted critical weaknesses in the existing framework for the protection of migrant workers. The lack of coordinated inspections, inadequate housing and limited resources for monitoring working conditions undermine the implementation of the laws. In addition, impunity for employers and delays in the administration of justice exacerbate workers' sense of vulnerability. An essential lesson is the need to strengthen the Labour Inspectorate with human and technological resources, and to introduce incentives for employers who comply with their obligations, promoting a sustainable and fair system.

7.3 NGO-Led Integration Initiatives

In the absence of comprehensive state-led integration programs for rural migrants, several NGOs have pioneered initiatives to address the social and economic needs of agricultural workers.

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Meltemi Project (Crete): The Meltemi Project operates mobile units providing language classes, vocational training, and healthcare access to migrant communities in Crete's greenhouse-dominated agricultural zones.

Migrant Communities Network (MCN): MCN supports migrant-led cooperatives, empowering workers to move beyond precarious wage labor. By pooling resources and skills, these cooperatives help migrants gain agency and foster rural revitalization.

Impact and Limitations: While these initiatives have improved the lives of hundreds of migrant workers, they operate on limited budgets and face challenges scaling their efforts to meet national needs. Their success underscores the importance of integrating civil society efforts into broader state policies.

IOM Greece - Cities Network for Integration IOM (International Organization for Migration) supports the "Cities Network for Integration", a network of 18 Greek municipalities (e.g. Athens, Thessaloniki, Heraklion), which exchange good practices for the social integration of migrants, through partnerships with local bodies and international organizations.

HIAS Greece - Legal & Psychosocial Support HIAS Greece provides free legal representation and psychosocial support to vulnerable refugees and migrants (children, victims of violence), contributing significantly to their access to services, study and integration.

International Rescue Committee (IRC) - RAISE EU Programme IRC, in cooperation with A.S.P.I.D.A., implements the RAISE EU Programme, providing information on the rights of refugees, enhancing their accessibility to public services and organizing training sessions for social integration.

7.4 Insights from Focus Groups

For the needs of the Primacenters project and in order to analyze the challenges of Employment and Social Integration of migrants in the Peloponnese Region, the Greek pilot created an extended network of stakeholders and migrants who presented their experience in this field. This is a Comparative Analysis of Challenges and Proposals for the Employment and Social Integration of Migrants in the Peloponnese Region which compares the responses of migrants

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(questionnaire) with those of stakeholders (focus groups & interviews) regarding the challenges of employment and social integration. Convergences are highlighted (e.g. the critical importance of language and access to services) as well as divergences (e.g. migrants focus more on experiential/immediate obstacles, stakeholders on institutional solutions).

7.4.1 Methodology

Three datasets were integrated: (a) responses to migrant questionnaires, (b) responses from stakeholder focus groups, and (c) responses from stakeholder interviews. Basic text cleaning, and thematic coding with a common seed lexicon per theme were applied.

Comparative Findings per Theme

1. **Employment**

   Migrants highlight difficulties in finding work, low wages and dependence on informal networks. Stakeholders focus on bureaucratic barriers for employers and the need for institutional solutions (DYPA, training).

2. **Language & Education**

There is common recognition of language as a key factor. Migrants stress the lack of access and issues of cost/scheduling; stakeholders propose certified training linked to professions.

3. **Services & Access**

Migrants: pathways through 'acquaintances', individual effort, opaque procedures. Stakeholders: need for coordination, one□stop□shops, multilingual information.

4. **Discrimination & Racism**

Migrants report experiences of suspicion/rejection. Stakeholders perceive a dual picture: acceptance where there is labor demand, but persistence of stereotypes without contact/awareness.

5. **Housing & Living Conditions**

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Migrants report difficulties finding housing and periods of homelessness. Stakeholders link housing to access to information, legal work and income.

6. Social Integration & Participation

Both groups recognize the importance of community structures, mentoring and local collaborations. Stakeholders stress the need for stable funding and networking.

7.4.2 Policy/Action Proposals (Synthetic) Critical Analysis

The proposals put forward constitute a coherent set of interventions covering the entire spectrum of integration. They can be grouped into three main pillars below.

Institutional organization & access to services

- The creation of one-stop-shops with interpretation and multilingual digital services responds both to migrants' experience of opaque procedures and stakeholders' need for better coordination.
- The mechanism for reporting discrimination and anti-stereotype campaign creates a protective framework, enhancing trust in institutions.

Employment & education

- Linking job-matching with DYPA training programs and employer participation responds to both market needs and migrants' demand for stable employment.
- Targeted language programs tied to professional pathways transform language from a general barrier into a skill development tool.
- Strengthening SEPE inspections and providing interpretation in complaints procedures are critical safeguards against exploitation.

Social integration & housing

- The proposal for rent subsidies/housing first addresses the most pressing barrier identified by migrants: housing.
- Community integration centers with mentoring and networking between NGOs, municipalities and employers turn social participation into a daily experience rather than an ad hoc intervention.

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Overall, the policy framework is multi-level, bridging experiential barriers and institutional weaknesses, and proposing both immediate actions (e.g. housing first) and long-term structures (e.g. one-stop-shops, community centers).

7.4.3 Sample Quotations (indicative) Interpretation

- Migrants — Employment: “Long working hours all day with little money.” → Summarizes the experience of exploitation and precarious employment. Provides a direct sense of everyday reality.
- Stakeholders — Services: “Need for coordination at local level and multilingual information.” → Expresses the institutional gap observed by stakeholders: not a lack of willingness, but a lack of coordination and systematic information.

The inclusion of excerpts highlights the gap between experience and system; it reinforces the validity of the analysis and provides tangible illustrations.

7.4.4 Conclusion

There is clear convergence on the importance of language, employment and access to services. Migrants shed light on experiential barriers, while stakeholders highlight institutional gaps. An integrated strategy must combine the two perspectives with coherent interventions.

Convergence points: Both groups (migrants and stakeholders) recognize the importance of language, employment and access to services as fundamental factors of integration.

Difference of perspective: Migrants emphasize experiential and immediate barriers: low wages, inability to secure housing, language gap. Stakeholders focus on institutional and structural gaps: bureaucracy, lack of coordination, lack of funding.

Strategic direction: A comprehensive policy should combine both perspectives — that is, translate migrants’ lived experience into targeted institutional interventions, in a way that has a tangible impact on daily life.

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8. Policy Recommendations & Best Practices

8.1 Policy Recommendations

The findings of this report underscore the urgent need for Greece to modernize its migration governance framework and agricultural labor practices. Below are key recommendations aimed at promoting a more sustainable, rights-based approach:

1. Expand and Diversify Bilateral Agreements Building on the Egypt–Greece and Bangladesh–Greece agreements, Greece should negotiate additional bilateral labor migration agreements with countries such as India, Nepal, and Ukraine. Diversification would create a more stable supply of seasonal labor while reducing dependency on irregular channels. These agreements should include robust provisions on worker rights, housing standards, and employer accountability.
2. Simplify and Digitalize Permit Systems The “METAKLISI” system’s complexity discourages employer participation. Transitioning to a fully digitalized permit application process would reduce delays and administrative burdens. Mobile permit services could be deployed in rural areas to support both employers and workers, ensuring timely recruitment and renewals.
3. Strengthen Labor Rights Enforcement The Labor Inspectorate (SEPE) requires increased funding and staffing, with the introduction of mobile inspection units focusing on agricultural hotspots during peak seasons. Stronger enforcement mechanisms—including penalties for wage theft, unsafe housing, and workplace exploitation—would deter noncompliance and enhance protection for workers.
4. Enhance Integration Services in Rural Areas Most integration programs are urban-centric. Expanding language classes, vocational training, and healthcare services to rural migrant communities is essential. Partnerships with NGOs already active in rural areas could extend their reach and impact.
5. Support Cooperative and Inclusive Rural Development Models Encourage the formation of migrant-led agricultural cooperatives, allowing workers to become stakeholders in production chains. Financial support and technical assistance could empower migrants to contribute to rural revitalization efforts and promote social cohesion.

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8.2 Best Practices

Greece can draw lessons from successful models:

Crete's Meltemi Project In Greece, the Meltemi Project's mobile integration units provide a promising template for scaling up services to rural migrant communities. By combining healthcare, language support, and legal aid, the project bridges critical gaps left by state programs.

Bangladesh-Greece Agreement Innovations The inclusion of long-term residence options in the Bangladesh-Greece agreement provides a pathway for seasonal workers to transition into more stable roles, strengthening both integration and workforce sustainability.

Centre for Integration of Migrants of the Municipality of Thessaloniki It operates as a support point for migrants and refugees, providing services such as Greek language courses, information on rights, employment counselling, psychosocial support and linking with governmental agencies and NGOs. The centre achieves holistic integration, covering both practical and social needs.

"The Acting Project" - Caritas Hellas (speech and theatre) The project reached out to youth from countries such as Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan with artistic workshops and performances, enhancing language skills, self-expression and a sense of community through theatre as a means of social inclusion.

Open Cultural Center (OCC) Voluntary initiative that started in camps such as Idomeni and continues near reception centres (e.g. Polykastro). Offers meal courses, software and creative activities to children and adults, enhancing education, cultural dialogue and psychosocial well-being.

9.Conclusion

Greece's agricultural sector stands at a crossroads. Long a cornerstone of the national economy, it now faces mounting challenges including rural depopulation, an aging workforce, and chronic labor shortages. In this context, migrant workers have become indispensable to sustaining agricultural production and ensuring the country's food security. From harvesting strawberries

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in the Peloponnese to cultivating greenhouse vegetables in Crete, migrants are the backbone of Greece's primary sector labor force. However, their contributions often go unrecognized, and their working conditions remain precarious. Many migrant workers operate in informal arrangements, lacking basic labor rights, adequate housing, and access to healthcare. Cases such as the Nea Manolada shooting in 2013 highlight systemic failures in protecting migrant laborers from exploitation and abuse. While recent policy developments, including Law 5078/2023 and bilateral agreements with Egypt and Bangladesh, represent steps toward formalizing migration pathways, gaps in enforcement and oversight persist. For Greece to achieve sustainable agricultural development and social cohesion in rural areas, a holistic approach is needed. This includes expanding legal labor migration channels, strengthening labor rights protections, and investing in integration services tailored to rural contexts. Initiatives like the Meltemi Project in Crete demonstrate the potential of community-based solutions, but scaling such efforts requires coordinated action from the state, civil society, and agricultural stakeholders. Ultimately, integrating migrants into Greece's rural fabric is not only a moral imperative but also an economic necessity. By fostering inclusive policies and fair labor practices, Greece can transform its reliance on migrant labor into an opportunity for revitalizing rural communities and building a more resilient agricultural sector.

10. References

1. Table recording sources of ¨metaklisis¨

2. Data Table

3. Data Table ¨Peloponnese, Western Greece and Ionian Sea¨

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11. Annex A - Table recording sources of "METAKLISIS":

Invitation system (admission of third-country nationals for work) for the years **2023-2025**:

1. Law 5038/2023 - "Migration Code" (Government Gazette A' 81, 1/4/2023)

- Introduces the new framework for the employment of third-country nationals, including through recruitment (Article 62, Chapter C') Agrotypos+7Forin+7Forin+7

2. Joint Ministerial Decision 35400/03-04-2023 (Government Gazette B' 2189/3-4-2023)

- Sets a ceiling on residence permits for third-country nationals for work (seasonal, highly skilled, etc.) Forin+3Forin+3Lawspot+3

3. MINISTERIAL DECREE 14761/2024 (OFFICIAL GAZETTE B' 1390/1-3-2024)

- Amends the provisions of Decree 35400/2023, specifying detailed numbers of licences per region for 2023-2024 Forin+1Lawspot+1

4. Joint Ministerial Decision 133226/2024 (Government Gazette B' 2626/2-5-2024)

- Formulates the required documents and procedures for employers submitting post-recall applications under Law No.5038/2023 Ministry of Immigration and Asylum+6e-nomothesia+6National Register of Administrative Procedures+6

5. Act of the Council of Ministers - number 56/23.12.2024 (Government Gazette A' 210)

- Specifies the sectors (agriculture, forestry, etc.) for the entry of seasonal and skilled workers Ministry of Immigration and Asylum+13Lawspot+13Agrotypos+13

6. Ministry of Labour Accounts

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- They report that the postings of third-country workers for the period 2023-2024 amounted to approx:

- **91,630 seasonal workers**
- **168,609 dependent labour**
- **122,312 highly skilled workers**

12. Annex B - Data Table:

Table of Data Sources

Item	Source
Population of Greece (2024)	ELSTAT
Foreign nationals (1.15 million / 11.3%)	ELSTAT / Eurostat
Albanian immigrants (55-60% foreigners)	ELSTAT, Ministry of Immigration Policy
Residence permits 2023 (~118,800, 10% for work)	Ministry of Migration & Immigration Asylum
Legalisation applications 2024 (19,600 applications, 10,000 approvals)	Law 5078/2023, Ministry of Immigration
Agriculture contribution to GDP (~4%)	ELSTAT / OECD
Employment in the agricultural sector (615,000 persons, 12.4%)	ELSTAT

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Average farm size (6.6 hectares)	ELSTAT (Agricultural Census)
Age of farmers (50% >60 years old)	ELSTAT, Eurostat Agricultural Census
Non-EU migrants in agriculture (50-70% in some areas)	Eurostat / Field Surveys
Egypt: 5,000 workers per year	Egypt-Greece agreement (2022)
Bangladesh: 4,000 seasonal + 15,000 long-term	Bangladesh-Greece Agreement (2023)
Invitation system: 147,000 permits (2023-2025)	Ministry of Labour / Ministry of Immigration
ECHR Manolada decision (588,000 € compensation)	ECHR: Chowdury and Others v. Greece (2017)
Migrant working hours (10-12 hours/day, 6-7 days/week)	Field surveys, interviews
Migrant housing (greenhouses, containers, etc.)	NGO reports (SolidarityNow, ARSIS)
Overskilled non-EU migrants (70%)	Eurostat (2023)

Annex C - Data Table ¨Peloponnese, Western Greece and Ionian Sea¨

Hellenic Republic, Ministry of Migration & Asylum, Information Sheets – Country Overview, https://migration.gov.gr/statistika/

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Comparison of Greece & Greece data Peloponnese, Western Greece & Ionian Sea

Item	Greece	Peloponnese, Western Greece & Ionian Islands
Population of Greece (2024)	10.400.000	-
Foreign nationals (1.15 million / 11.3%)	1.150.000 (11,3%)	-
Residence permits (May 2025)	501.093	-
Applications for legalisation 2024	19,600 applications, 10,000 approvals	-
Employment in the agricultural sector	615,000 persons (12.4%)	-
Average size of holdings	6.6 hectares (average)	-
Non-EU migrants in agriculture	50-70% in some regions	-
Workers from Egypt (2022 agreement)	5,000 per year	-
Workers from Bangladesh (2023 agreement)	4,000 seasonal + 15,000 long-term	-
Recruitment system (2023-2025)	147,000 permits	-
Pending applications for residence permits (May 2025)	293.035	29.666
Initial permits issued (2021-2025)	366.523	39.337

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Renewals of licences (2021-2025)	635.287	69.154
Applications for a new type of residence permit (N.5078/2023)	46,550 applications	-

13. Annex C: WP2 – Activities Numbers

County	**Greece**
Name of the event	**Number of participants**
Networking event 1	20
Networking event 2	22
Focus group	14
Interviews	15
MoUs	19

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