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Greek Coast Guard Rescues More Than 700 Migrants in 48 Hours

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According to the coast guard, the rescue operations mostly occurred on the islands of Lesbos, Kos, Samos and Ikaria, in the Aegean Sea, which – because of its proximity to Turkey – has become the main entry route taken by migrants trying to get to the European Union.

In one of the operations, conducted on Saturday near the island of Simi, a 17-year-old immigrant died during a shootout between Greek coast guard personnel and alleged people traffickers.

According to an official statement, the clash occurred when several alleged traffickers were sailing a boat loaded with about 70 migrants and opened fire on a Greek coast guard vessel and a boat belonging to Frontex, the European border management force.

A member of the coast guard and one of the traffickers were also wounded, the coast guard said.

Meanwhile, on Saturday night 2,488 people arrived at the port of Athens on board the ferry Eleftherios Venizelos, which in recent weeks has been transporting refugees and immigrants from the Greek islands to the mainland.

Most of the immigrants were transferred in buses to the capital's main railway station, from where they continued their journey to the border with Macedonia, a country which – like Greece – has been overwhelmed by the recent flood of migrants.

The new arrivals, most of them Syrian refugees, are mainly seeking to get to central and northern Europe.

Figures published by the United Nations Refugee Agency indicate that so far this year more than 180,000 undocumented migrants have arrived in Greece, more than four times the number who arrived in 2014.

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