



REPORT 3: Rethink Migration final report

The report follows up on report 1 mapping international migration within the territory of the Hellenic Republic over the course of years 2014 – 2016, and report 2 mapping events pertaining to international migration in year 2017 and early 2018. All reports have been prepared as part of the project *Rethink Migration* implemented by the NGO Civis Plus from September 2017 till August 2018.

The terms *international migration* and *migration* are used in the meaning of mixed migration flows, i.e. encompassing refugees, asylum seekers and irregular migrants, while the focus is primarily on people seeking and qualifying for international protection.

As the report builds on the phenomenon of immigration to the European Union via Greece as the first contact country, the subject matter of the report is contextualized in the framework of the European Union, particularly its evolving legal framework pertaining to migration and international protection regime.

The report has been informed by legally binding international and regional tools, soft law, as well as findings resulting from research, study visits and fact finding missions executed by international and national organisations, state bodies and non-governmental entities.

The report contains an update on the framework depicted in the previous two reports, and outputs and conclusions derived from a qualitative research that had been conducted in the period from December 2017 to February 2018.

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Erasmus+

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The present report follows up on report 1¹ mapping international migration within the territory of the Hellenic Republic over the course of years 2014 – 2016 and report 2² mapping events pertaining to international migration in year 2017 and early 2018. All three reports have been prepared as part of the project *Rethink Migration* implemented by the NGO Civis Plus from September 2017 till August 2018.

Chapter *Major events and developments in the region* of the present report helps illustrate significant changes and developments primarily within the period from January 2018 until the end of June 2018. The chapter, however, includes also several important highlights from the end of the year 2017, as the statistic information pertaining to them had not yet been available at the time of completing the report 2.

Chapter *Qualitative research* elaborates on a small-scale qualitative research conducted in the period from December 2017 until February 2018.

1. Major events and developments in the region

1.1. International protection system: Common European Asylum System (CEAS) revision

Dublin Regulation

According to the *Danish Refugee Council* (DRC), the current Dublin III Regulation system within which authorities make decisions mainly concerning family reunification, in practice keeps families separated and often does not adequately take the best interests of the child into consideration.

In its policy brief, DRC elaborates on its position on the proposed Dublin IV Regulation regarding the topic of families and children. In particular, it stresses that *"The Dublin System should ensure the rights of families and children through:*

- *An expanded definition of 'family member' in the Dublin IV Regulation that is based on actual family ties such as siblings, adult children living with their parents, parents living with their adult children and unmarried couples;*
- *Transparent and flexible guidelines on how the Member States must apply the Dublin Regulation including proactive and flexible use of the dependency clause and the discretionary clauses to keep families together;*
- *Clear guidelines on how Member States should conduct and include assessments of the best interests of the child in Dublin decisions involving children; and*
- *Access to high-quality free legal aid for all asylum seekers to assist them navigate in the complex Dublin rules."*³

Catherine Woollard, Secretary General for the *European Council on Refugees and Exiles* (ECRE) commented on the ongoing CEAS revision process:

"After two years of tortuous and time-consuming negotiations, there is no sign that discussions on the reform of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) are going to reach a satisfactory conclusion. The sticking point remains the reform of the Dublin Regulation (...)." ⁴

¹ Available at: http://civisplus.gr/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Civis-Plus_EVS-project-RM_Report-1.pdf

² Available at: http://civisplus.gr/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Civis-Plus_EVS-project-RM_Report-2.pdf

³ Danish Refugee Council: *When the Dublin System Keeps Families Apart*. (May 2018).

Available at: <https://drc.ngo/media/4530554/drc-policy-brief-when-the-dublin-system-keeps-families-apart-may-2018-final.pdf>

⁴ European Council of Refugees and Exiles: *Editorial: Asylum in Europe: Where do we go now?* (8 June 2018).

Available at: <https://www.ecre.org/editorial-asylum-in-europe-where-do-we-go-now/>

The European Council meeting at the end of June 2018 was supposed to be a pivotal meeting also regarding the long-overdue reform of the EU asylum policy. However, the question has not been addressed and only vague conclusions regarding new "controlled centres" have been adopted (see chapter [1.12.](#)).

1.2. Regional instruments

EU – Turkey agreement

March 2018 marked the two-year anniversary of the EU – Turkey statement. In the result of its implementation, thousands of asylum seekers ended up being trapped on the Aegean islands in deplorable conditions and without access to adequate services and protection.

*"The containment policy was put in place by Greece, with the support of the European Commission and other European Union member states, to prevent people seeking asylum from leaving the islands for mainland Greece. The Greek government also argues that the policy is necessary to carry out its commitment under the EU-Turkey Statement on migration."*⁵

*"In December 2017, following the official visit of the Turkish President in Athens, the Greek authorities proposed to their Turkish counterparts that readmission to Turkey within the framework of the EU-Turkey Statement cover not only the islands but also persons transferred from the islands to detention facilities on the mainland. There were no developments on this proposal by the end of March 2018."*⁶

Directive 2013/32/EU Recast Asylum Procedures Directive

Deadline for the transposition of the directive⁷ was 20 July 2015. The directive has been partially transposed into national Law 4375/2016. Article 31(3)-(5) of the directive, pertaining to the examination procedure of applications, is to be transposed by 20 July 2018.⁸

1.3. National instruments

National legislative framework

- According to the latest *Asylum Service Director Decision 868/2018 on the duration of validity of asylum seeker cards*, *Gov. Gazette B/201/30.1.2018*, issued in January 2018, the asylum seeker's card, which is provided to all persons who have fully registered their application, is valid for 6 months. This decision abolished the exception under the previous decision, according to which all cards were valid for 6 months with the exception of those provided to the nationals of Albania, Georgia and Pakistan, which were valid for 2 months.⁹

⁵ Greek Council for Refugees: Almost two years after EU-Turkey statement, people are still trapped on the islands. (Press release, 6 March 2018).

Available at: <https://www.gcr.gr/index.php/en/news/press-releases-announcements/item/793-almost-two-years-after-eu-turkey-statement-people-are-still-trapped-on-the-islands>

⁶ European Council for Refugees and Exiles, Greek Council for Refugees: *Country report: Greece (2017 update)*. (March 2018), p. 147.

Available at: http://www.asylumineurope.org/sites/default/files/report-download/aida_gr_2017update.pdf

⁷ See the full text here: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:32013L0032>

⁸ European Council for Refugees and Exiles, Greek Council for Refugees: *Country report: Greece (2017 update)*. (March 2018), p. 181.

Available at: http://www.asylumineurope.org/sites/default/files/report-download/aida_gr_2017update.pdf

See also <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/NIM/?uri=celex:32013L0032>

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

- On 19 April, 2018, the Greek government introduced a bill including reforms to the Greek Asylum System concerning transposition of the recast Reception Conditions Directive, and modification of the asylum procedure.

*"Article 7 provides the possibility for asylum seekers' freedom of movement to be restricted to part of the Greek territory on the basis of an Asylum Service Director decision of regulatory character. The decision to restrict freedom of movement is taken where necessary for the rapid processing and effective monitoring of asylum applications, while the restriction is to be mentioned on the asylum seekers' cards. According to the bill, violation of the terms of the aforementioned decision leads to a suspension of reception conditions for the asylum seeker concerned."*¹⁰

The proposal was introduced just two days after the Council of State annulment of the Asylum Service Director Decision which established the geographical restriction imposed on asylum seekers (see chapter [1.4.](#) and chapter [1.5.7.](#)). *"Parliament members should oppose such changes and press the government to respect the ruling."*¹¹

Policy framework

A *National strategic plan* concerning the integration of migrants has been announced by the Ministry for Migration Policy at the meeting with the Greek Forum of Migrants, in the beginning of the year 2018.¹²

1.4. Court rulings

Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU)

- Court of Justice of the European Union Judgment in Case C-550/16¹³:
 - Unaccompanied minors who applied for asylum in the EU but turned 18 before they were granted asylum retain the right to family reunification.
 - However, they must file an application for reunification within three months of the date on which they were recognised as having refugee status
 - Refugees who fall into this category will be regarded as minors even though they are 18 or older.

¹⁰ Asylum Information Database: *Greece: Reception standards and further dismantling of procedural safeguards in latest reform proposal*. (News, 20 April, 2018).

Available at: <http://www.asylumineurope.org/news/20-04-2018/greece-reception-standards-and-further-dismantling-procedural-safeguards-latest>

¹¹ European Council of Refugees and Exiles: *Greece: Government Defies Court on Asylum Seekers*. (News, 25 April, 2018).

Available at: <https://www.ecre.org/greece-government-defies-court-on-asylum-seekers/>

¹² Greek Forum of Migrants: *MIGRANTS vs INTEGRATION. Where do we stand?* (23 April 2018).

Available at: <http://www.migrant.gr/cgi-bin/pages/index.pl?arlang=English&argenkat=%CE%95%CE%A1%CE%93%CE%91%20%CE%9A%CE%91%CE%99%20%CE%94%CE%A1%CE%91%CE%A3%CE%95%CE%99%CE%A3%20%20%CE%99%CE%A3%CE%91%20%CE%94%CE%99%CE%9A%CE%91%CE%99%CE%A9%CE%9C%CE%91%CE%A4%CE%91&arcode=180423183532&type=article>

¹³ Court of Justice of the European Union: *An unaccompanied minor who attains the age of majority during the asylum procedure retains their right to family unification* (Press release No 40/2018, 12 April 2018).

Available at: <https://curia.europa.eu/jcms/upload/docs/application/pdf/2018-04/cp180040en.pdf>

See also:

European Council of Refugees and Exiles: *ECRE/ELENA Legal Note on Ageing Out and Family Reunification*. (News, 21 June 2018).

Available at: <https://www.ecre.org/ecre-elena-legal-note-on-ageing-out-and-family-reunification/>

- The court ruled that the right for young refugees to be reunified with their families is not at the discretion of the member states.

Council of State (the supreme administrative court of Greece)

- The Council of State decision annuls geographical restriction of asylum seekers on the islands¹⁴ (more information in chapter [1.5.7.](#))
- The Council of State decision in case of the Turkish soldier (more information in chapter [1.12.](#))

Lesbos District Court

- The Lesbos criminal court ruling in the case of 5 foreign NGO volunteers (more information in chapter [1.12.](#))

1.5. Procedures

1.5.1. Reception and identification services

A new Asylum Unit in Ioannina, Western Greece started operating in March 2018.

In March 2018, *substantial gaps in the provision of reception and identification services, including medical services*, were reported at Fylakio Reception and Identification Centre.

*"For example, a lack of interpretation in Farsi language and a lack of medical and social-psychological services is reported as of March 2018 due to which inter alia the identification of persons belonging to vulnerable groups is not possible."*¹⁵

The situation was particularly grave in April 2018, due to the unexpected temporary influx of refugees and migrants that arrived at Evros.

*"(...) over 3,600 refugees and migrants crossed to Evros, compared to some 3,000 by sea to the Aegean islands near Turkey. It was the first time in years that land arrivals surpassed sea arrivals. The total number of Evros arrivals from January-May was some 7,200 compared to an estimated 5,600 for the whole of 2017, according to data collated by UNHCR. The new arrivals came primarily from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan and included many families with children."*¹⁶

Hundreds were held in police facilities until they could be moved to Fylakio RIC.

Further problems were triggered by pay disputes: *"In addition, between 5 and 21 March 2018, fixed term staff have stopped providing their services (επίοχρηση εργασίας) as they have remained unpaid for a period exceeding three months. Consequently, as a number RAO such as Lesbos and Samos are mainly staffed with fixed-term employees, they have temporary halted their operation."*¹⁷

¹⁴ Asylum Information Database: *Greece: Council of State annuls geographical restriction of asylum seekers on the islands.* (News, 17 April 2018).

Available at: <http://www.asylumineurope.org/news/17-04-2018/greece-council-state-annuls-geographical-restriction-asylum-seekers-islands>

¹⁵ European Council for Refugees and Exiles, Greek Council for Refugees: *Country report: Greece (2017 update)*. (March 2018), p. 31.

Available at: http://www.asylumineurope.org/sites/default/files/report-download/aida_gr_2017update.pdf

¹⁶ UNHCR: *Fewer refugees arriving in Greece's Evros region, but problems remain.* (News, 12 June 2018).

Available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2018/6/5b1e69744/fewer-refugees-arriving-greeces-evros-region-problems-remain.html>

¹⁷ European Council for Refugees and Exiles, Greek Council for Refugees: *Country report: Greece (2017 update)*. (March 2018), p. 33.

Available at: http://www.asylumineurope.org/sites/default/files/report-download/aida_gr_2017update.pdf

Capacity of reception centres and accommodation facilities

As of January 2018, the number of reception places in the National Centre for Social Solidarity (EKKA) referral network in the **mainland** was **1,530**, marking a **decrease** compared to **1,896** places in January 2017. The places were available in **58** reception facilities mainly run by NGOs.

More precisely the number of places includes:

- **429** places for asylum seekers (mainly families and vulnerable asylum seekers) in 9 reception centres
- **783** places in 33 long-term shelters for unaccompanied children
- **318** places in 26 short-term ("transit") shelters for unaccompanied children¹⁸

EKKA is the only state authority with a reference network for the placement of asylum seekers. To address EKKA's limited capacities, UNHCR designed an accommodation scheme that was launched in 2015.

As of 26 June 2018, **21,767** beneficiaries of international protection were provided accommodation by UNHCR through the 'ESTIA'¹⁹ programme.²⁰ The scheme is dedicated to vulnerable applicants and accommodation is provided for a transitional period.

In addition, many camps were built throughout Greece to cover the accommodation needs of asylum seekers.

As of 31 January 2018, **12,609** newly arrived persons remained stranded at the **Eastern Aegean islands**, of which **301** were detained. The nominal capacity of the reception facilities (including RIC) was **7,876** places. The nominal capacity of RIC facilities (hotspots) only was **6,246** places, while 9,902 persons were residing there under a geographical restriction.²¹

As of 2015, empty buildings began to be occupied temporarily as a result of subhuman situations of the refugees that were living in the camps or on the street. The increase in the number of these occupied spaces in Athens began with the mobilizations to help hundreds of people who were camping in the **Pedion Areos park**.

Notara, located in the neighborhood of Exarchia, was the **first squat** of Athens. After the first squat's opening, more empty buildings have been occupied throughout Athens to the present (Jasmin, Oniro, City Plaza, etc.). In the beginning, it was intended that the refugees stay in the squats for a short

¹⁸ Asylum Information Data Base: *Greece: Types of Accommodation*.

Available at: <http://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/greece/reception-conditions/housing/types-accommodation>

¹⁹ Emergency Support to Integration & Accommodation (ESTIA) programme helps refugees and their families rent urban accommodation, and provides them with cash assistance.

More information at: https://ec.europa.eu/echo/where/europe/greece_en

²⁰ UNHCR: *Greece ESTIA Accommodation Capacity Weekly Update*. (26 June 2018).

Available at: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/64368>

²¹ Asylum Information Data Base: *Greece: Types of Accommodation*.

Available at: <http://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/greece/reception-conditions/housing/types-accommodation>

See also:

Ministry of Interior of the Hellenic Republic, National Coordination Center for Border Control, Immigration and Asylum (N.C.C.B.C.I.A.): *National situational picture regarding the islands of Eastern Aegean Sea (31/01/2018)*.

Available at:

<http://mindigital.gr/index.php/%CF%80%CF%81%CE%BF%CF%83%CF%86%CF%85%CE%B3%CE%B9%CE%BA%CF%8C-%CE%B6%CE%AE%CF%84%CE%B7%CE%BC%CE%B1-refugee-crisis/1930-national-situational-picture-regarding-the-islands-at-eastern-aegean-sea-31-01-2018>

period of time, while they were waiting for the necessary documents to continue their trip to the destination country or for family reunification. However, the reality is that many of the refugees have since lived in these places for years due to the slowness of the Greek offices and the immigration policy of the EU.

This has generated a situation of saturation in these places that are currently completely full, with very long waiting lists and sometimes hosting more people than their capacity would allow.

Reception conditions

The conditions prevailing on the Greek islands continue to be criticised by human rights bodies, international organisations and NGOs.

In February 2018, UNHCR stated: *"UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is very concerned by reports from asylum seekers of sexual harassment and violence in sub-standard reception centres on the Greek islands, despite welcomed Government measures to address overcrowding and dire living conditions. In 2017, UNHCR received reports from 622 survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) on the Greek Aegean islands, out of which at least 28 per cent experienced SGBV after arriving in Greece. Women reported inappropriate behaviour, sexual harassment and attempted sexual attacks as the most common forms of SGBV. The situation is particularly worrying in the Reception and Identification Centres (RIC) of Moria (Lesvos) and Vathy (Samos), where thousands of refugees continue to stay in unsuitable shelter with inadequate security. Some 5,500 people are in these centres, which is double their intended capacity. Reports of sexual harassment in Moria are particularly high."*²²

Reception of unaccompanied children

The EKKA network included a total of **1,101** places for unaccompanied children in January 2018. This represents a decrease compared to **1,312** places in January 2017.²³

UNHCR in its situation update fact sheet for 15 June 2018 reports that the total number of places in UAC shelters is **1,141**.²⁴

The estimated number of UAC currently in Greece is **3,790**, out of which **95,9% are boys, 4,1% are girls, and 5,2% children are younger than 14 years**. (The population estimation excludes 211 separated children.) **2,832** of these children are on a waiting list for a shelter.²⁵

As reality shows, **less than one third** of unaccompanied children in Greece can be accommodated in shelters due to their capacity.

Cash card assistance

The cash card assistance programme is being implemented throughout Greece by UNHCR within the 'ESTIA' programme funded by the European Commission, and in coordination with the Ministry of Migration Policy of Greece.

As of May 2018, the international NGOs involved in its implementation included: the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), Catholic Relief Services (CRS), and Mercy Corps.²⁶

²² UNHCR: *Refugee women and children face heightened risk of sexual violence amid tensions and overcrowding at reception facilities on Greek islands*. (Briefing notes, 9 February 2018).

Available at:

http://www.unhcr.org/5a7d67c4b?utm_source=PR_COMMS&utm_medium=email&utm_content=UNHCR%20Communication%20Service&utm_campaign=HQ_EN_BriefingNotes_171027

²³ Greek Council for Refugees: *Special reception needs of vulnerable groups. Greece*.

Available at: <http://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/greece/reception-conditions/special-reception-needs-vulnerable-groups>

²⁴ UNHCR, EKKA: *Unaccompanied Children (UAC) in Greece (15 June 2018)*.

Available at: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/64331>

²⁵ *Ibid.*

In May 2018, **49,057** eligible refugees and asylum-seekers (23,118 cash cards = households) received cash assistance in Greece, in 93 locations. Of the persons receiving assistance, 40% were children, 23% were women and 37% were men. One third of the beneficiaries were families of five members or more. The main nationalities were Syrian (40%), Iraqi (22%) and Afghan (17%).²⁷

1.5.2. Access to the application procedure on mainland

*"Two staff members of the Asylum Service together with an interpreter are dealing with the operation of the Skype application system on a daily basis. The number of hours per week during which the Asylum Service Skype line is available has slightly increased in 2018. As of February 2018, the Skype line is available for 25 hours per week for access to the RAO of Attica, Alimos and Piraeus and 21 hours per week for RAO outside Attica region, compared to a total of 20 and 18 hours respectively as of March 2017. (...) Despite this slight increase, however, available hours per week to access the Skype line remain limited. This hinders the access of persons willing to apply for asylum. Consequently, prospective asylum seekers frequently have to try multiple times, often over a period of several months, before they manage to get through the Skype line and to obtain appointment for the registration of their application, all the while facing the danger of a potential arrest and detention by the police."*²⁸

The Greek Ombudsman has also *"reported extensively in the past on the problems of accessing exclusively through Skype and has evaluated this specific practice to be a restrictive system that seems to be in contrast with the principle of universal, continuous and unobstructed access to the asylum procedure"*²⁹, and noted that *"the way the Skype is used by [the Asylum] Service, instead of being part of the solution has become part of the problem of access to asylum"*³⁰.

1.5.3. Duration

*"Processing times: The average processing time at first instance is reported at about 6 months as of December 2017. The actual average duration of the first instance procedure is longer if the delay between pre-registration and registration of the application is taken into consideration. 4,052 applications were pending for a period exceeding the year at the end of December 2017. Taking into consideration the fact that the personal interview had not yet taken place in 74.1% of cases by the end of January 2018 and the fact that personal interview appointments are scheduled approximately one year or more after the full registration of the application, the number of applications pending at first instance for over a year is highly likely to increase in the coming period."*³¹

The Greek Council for Refugees also reports that they are aware of cases of significant delays with regard to scheduling of interviews also in cases of vulnerable applicants.³²

²⁶ UNHCR Greece: Greece Cash Assistance – May 2018. (6 June 2018).

Available at: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/63983>

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ European Council for Refugees and Exiles, Greek Council for Refugees: *Country report: Greece (2017 update)*. (March 2018), p. 36.

Available at: http://www.asylumineurope.org/sites/default/files/report-download/aida_gr_2017update.pdf

²⁹ Ibid., p. 37.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 37.

³¹ Ibid., p. 15.

See also:

<https://www.facebook.com/481351218685655/photos/a.578873295600113.1073741828.481351218685655/966977410123031/?type=3&theater>

³² European Council for Refugees and Exiles, Greek Council for Refugees: *Country report: Greece (2017 update)*. (March 2018), p. 41.

1.5.4. Appeals procedure

As of February 2018, in total 12 Independent Appeals Committees were operational.³³

1.5.5. Legal assistance

Legal assistance at first instance

In January 2018, 14 legal aid NGOs issued a paper in which they identified *12 junctures for which legal assistance is required in the process of examination of asylum claims in order to endure the respect of rights connected to applicants' basic needs*.³⁴

As of January 2018, NGOs under UNHCR funding have provided free legal assistance and counselling in nearly 11,450 cases in sites, urban areas and detention. This number includes asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection, and covers asylum procedures, family reunification, child protection, protection of sexual and gender-based violence survivors, as well as other relevant administrative procedures and access to rights.³⁵

Legal assistance in appeals

Article 44(2) L 4375/2016 sets legal basis for the provision of free legal assistance to applicants in appeal procedures before the Appeals Authority. Pertaining to that, the terms and conditions for the implementation of the provision in practice have been determined by a Ministerial Decision 12205/2016 issued in September 2016. However, it was not until one year later, on 21 September 2017, that the **first state-funded legal aid scheme** in Greece started operating.

*"According to the Ministerial Decision 12205/2016 regulating the state-funded legal aid scheme, asylum seekers must request legal aid at least 10 days before the date of examination of the appeal under the regular procedure, while shorter time limits are foreseen for the Admissibility Procedure, Accelerated Procedure and Fast-Track Border Procedure. If a legal representative has not been appointed at the latest 5 days before the examination of the appeal under the regular procedure, the applicant may request a postponement of the examination. The Decision also explicitly provides for the possibility of legal assistance through video conferencing in every Regional Asylum Office. Lawyers are remunerated based on a fixed sum of €80 per appeal."*³⁶

In, practice, the capacity of the scheme remains limited. A total of 21 lawyers were registered on the list managed by the Asylum Service. By the end of 2017, 941 asylum seekers had benefited by the scheme, **3,600** more appellants received legal assistance under the UNHCR-funded scheme, while the total number of appeals lodged in 2017 was **11,632**.³⁷

Available at: http://www.asylumineurope.org/sites/default/files/report-download/aida_gr_2017update.pdf

³³ European Council for Refugees and Exiles, Greek Council for Refugees: *Country report: Greece (2017 update)*. (March 2018), p. 45.

Available at: http://www.asylumineurope.org/sites/default/files/report-download/aida_gr_2017update.pdf

³⁴ Legal Aid Actors Task Force: *Legal Aid (Individual Legal Representation in Asylum/Refugee Context) for Migrants, Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Greece: Challenges and Barriers*. (January 2018).

Available at: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/61989>

³⁵ European Council for Refugees and Exiles, Greek Council for Refugees: *Country report: Greece (2017 update)*. (March 2018), p. 52.

Available at: http://www.asylumineurope.org/sites/default/files/report-download/aida_gr_2017update.pdf

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 52-53.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

1.5.6. Detention

Detention facilities conditions

As of 29 January 2018, 9 pre-removal detention centres with a nominal capacity of 6,927 places, were established. The detention centre in Samos, however, has not yet become operational by March 2018.

Despite the commitments from the Greek authorities to terminate such practices, third-country nationals including asylum seekers continued to be detained also in police stations and special holding facilities.³⁸

The European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) confirmed the *"persisting reality of wide disparities in standards across Greece's detention centres"*³⁹. Apart from certain improvements in some of the pre-removal centres, the Committee expressed serious concerns about the abhorrent and sub-standard conditions in several other pre-removal centres and police stations.⁴⁰

Access to asylum procedure from administrative detention

The Greek Council of Refugees reports that access to the asylum procedure for persons detained for the purpose of removal is *"highly problematic"*⁴¹.

*"The time period between the expression of intention to apply for asylum and the registration of the claim varies depending the circumstances of each case, and in particular the capacity of the competent authority and the number of people willing to apply for asylum from detention. For example, according to GCR's experience, in February 2018, an average period ranging from 2 weeks to 1 month was needed for the registration of an application for a person detained in the Amygdaleza pre-removal centre. Respectively in Corinth this period is reported to be much longer, even exceeding 3 months for specific nationalities such as Pakistan or Afghanistan."*⁴²

1.5.7. Restriction of movement on the Eastern Aegean islands

The lawfulness of the geographical confinement of the persons arriving on the Eastern Aegean islands after 20 March 2016 has been questioned for several reasons, including:

"No prior decision of the Asylum Service is issued and no proper justification is provided for the imposition of restriction of movement on each island, as required by Article 7 of the recast Reception Conditions Directive. In particular, as provided by Decision 10464/2017 of the Director of the Asylum Service, a geographical restriction on the island is imposed to any asylum seeker whose application has been lodged before the RAO of Lesbos, Rhodes, Samos, Leros and Chios and the AAU of Kos, with the

³⁸ Greek Council for Refugees: *Place of detention. Greece.*

Available at: <http://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/greece/detention-asylum-seekers/detention-conditions/place-detention>

³⁹ Asylum Information Database: *Greece: CPT slams inhuman detention conditions at the border.* (News, 1 June 2018).

Available at: <http://www.asylumineurope.org/news/01-06-2018/greece-cpt-slams-inhuman-detention-conditions-border>

⁴⁰ Asylum Information Database: *Greece: CPT slams inhuman detention conditions at the border.* (News, 1 June 2018).

Available at: <http://www.asylumineurope.org/news/01-06-2018/greece-cpt-slams-inhuman-detention-conditions-border>

⁴¹ European Council for Refugees and Exiles, Greek Council for Refugees: *Country report: Greece (2017 update)*. (March 2018), p.37.

Available at: http://www.asylumineurope.org/sites/default/files/report-download/aida_gr_2017update.pdf

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.37.

exception of applications which have been referred to the regular procedure. Consequently, the geographical restriction on the islands is an indiscriminate measure, imposed en masse, without individual examination and without any assessment regarding the impact of the geographical restriction on applicants' "subsistence and... their physical and mental health, taking into consideration reception conditions prevailing on the islands." ⁴³

On 17 April 2018, the Greek Council of State issued Decision No 805/2018, allowing an action brought by the Greek Council of Refugees and the Bar Associations of Lesbos, Rhodes, Chios, Kos and Samos for the annulment of the Asylum Service Director Decision 10464/2017.

"The Council of State held that the regime of geographical restriction within the aforementioned islands has resulted in unequal distribution of asylum seekers across the national territory and significant pressure on the affected islands compared to other regions, including negative effects on their economy and public order." ⁴⁴

The practice resulted in people being "obliged to reside for prolonged periods in overcrowded facilities, where food and water supply is insufficient, sanitation is poor and security highly problematic"⁴⁵.

The Council of State also "highlighted that the Decision of the Asylum Service Director, issued pursuant to Article 41 of Law 4375/2016, does not set out legal grounds for the imposition of restrictions on asylum seekers' freedom of movement. Insofar as it deduced no serious reasons of public interest from the Decision in order to justify such a measure, the Council of State majority annulled the Decision in question. Accordingly, the basis for the restriction of persons who apply for international protection on the islands of Lesbos, Rhodes, Chios, Samos, Leros and Kos is void." ⁴⁶

1.5.8. Relocation scheme

Out of the target of 66,400 asylum seekers to be relocated from Greece, 21,999 had effectively been transferred as of 26 June 2018.⁴⁷

1.6. Information for asylum seekers

In January 2018, the Asylum Service published an illustrated booklet with information tailored to asylum-seeking children. The booklet is available in 6 languages.⁴⁸

However, it should be borne in mind, in line with the recommendations raised at the roundtable and child consultations held by the Council of Europe in November 2017, that information leaflets

⁴³ European Council for Refugees and Exiles, Greek Council for Refugees: *Country report: Greece (2017 update)*. (March 2018), p.120-121.

Available at: http://www.asylumineurope.org/sites/default/files/report-download/aida_gr_2017update.pdf

⁴⁴ Asylum Information Database: *Greece: Council of State annuls geographical restriction of asylum seekers on the islands*. (News, 17 April 2018).

Available at: <http://www.asylumineurope.org/news/17-04-2018/greece-council-state-annuls-geographical-restriction-asylum-seekers-islands>

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ European Commission: *Member States' Support to Emergency Relocation Mechanism*. (26 June 2018).

Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/press-material/docs/state_of_play_-_relocation_en.pdf

⁴⁸ Available at: http://asylo.gov.gr/?page_id=6210

should be used as *"a complementary means of communicating information already provided by professionals verbally; and information should be given promptly and as an on-going process at each stage of the procedure"*⁴⁹.

1.7. Withdrawal of protection status

On 26 January 2018, the Asylum Service issued a circular detailing the application of the ground relating to threat to society following a final conviction for a particularly serious crime.⁵⁰

1.8. Access to health care

Article 33 L 4368/2016 provides free access to public health services for persons without social insurance and vulnerable groups. Asylum seekers and members of their families are also considered persons belonging to vulnerable groups.

*"In practice, asylum seekers face administrative barriers to access to the health care system, which are linked to the refusal of authorities to issue a Social Security Number (Αριθμός Μητρώου Κοινωνικής Ασφάλισης, AMKA). Following a Joint Statement by 25 NGOs in August 2017, a Circular issued on 13 February 2018 clarifies the process of issuance of AMKA to beneficiaries of international protection and asylum seekers. The implementation of the circular remains to be seen."*⁵¹

1.9. Access to education

*"By February 2018, there were no afternoon preparatory classes (DYEP) operating in the Northern Aegean. In January 2018, the Ministry of Education together with the Ministry Migration Policy announced a pilot programme of Greek language courses funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), targeting asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection over the age of 15. A group of 2,000 persons between the age of 15 to 18 and a 3,000 persons over 18 would be able to participate in the programme in 2018, as announced."*⁵²

In February 2018, the Refugee Support Aegean reported that majority of refugee children in the Aegean islands hotspots are excluded from education. The programme of integrating refugee children into education process, mainly in the form of the afternoon reception/preparatory classes (DYEP), has been launched in the school year 2016/2017. However, its implementation in the Aegean islands has been problematic, creating huge gaps in relation to education of children living in the hotspots.

"The current lack of access of refugee children to formal education accentuates the pre-existing problems of discontinued education or illiteracy. At the same time, this continued lack of access to education

⁴⁹ Council of Europe: *Child-friendly information for children in migration*. Roundtable conference report. (November 2017), p. 6.

Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/child-friendly-information-for-children-in-migration-roundtable-confer/168078b512>

⁵⁰ European Council for Refugees and Exiles, Greek Council for Refugees: *Country report: Greece (2017 update)*. (March 2018), p. 173.

Available at: http://www.asylumineurope.org/sites/default/files/report-download/aida_gr_2017update.pdf

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 139.

⁵² Ibid., p. 138-139.

*creates significant problems and difficulties for refugee families, as it increases further social inequality and strengthens already existing racist stereotypes."*⁵³

1.10. Access to labour market

On 28 August 2017, the Secretary General for Migration Policy addressed a letter to the competent authorities, giving instructions for a proper implementation of the law regarding the provision of the Tax Registration Number (Αριθμός Φορολογικού Μητρώου, AFM) to asylum seekers. Access of asylum seekers to the labour market has often been hindered by the refusals of the tax office officials to issue AFM, while their excuses contradicted the applicable legal framework.⁵⁴

Further issues have been reported with regard to unemployment benefits: *"(...) asylum seekers residing in a reception facility could not be registered as unemployed with the Unemployment Office of the Hellenic Manpower Employment Organisation (Οργανισμός Απασχόλησης Εργατικού Δυναμικού, ΟΑΕΔ) and could not access unemployment benefits due to the fact that they could not provide AFM and/or a Social Security Number (Αριθμός Μητρώου Κοινωνικής Ασφάλισης, ΑΜΚΑ), or a house contract. On 28 February 2018, following a decision of ΟΑΕΔ, the possibility to provide a certification from the reception facility has been added for asylum seekers willing to register themselves at the ΟΑΕΔ registry."*⁵⁵

1.11. Access to social benefits

Despite the fact that the law provides the same access to social welfare for beneficiaries of international protection (refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection) as to the nationals, in practice the former do not enjoy the same rights and are practically excluded from receiving the necessary social assistance due to the fact they can rarely fulfil respective administrative criteria.⁵⁶

1.12. Other events

The following events have received significant attention from the media. However, the key reason they are being mentioned in the present report is that they serve as grave proofs of the international protection system flaws and malfunctions in practice, and help illustrate the underlying needs for improvement.

Conflict at the Moria hotspot

It is with no doubt that the conflict at the Moria hotspot (Lesbos island) is a direct outcome of the containment policy implemented in the context of the EU-Turkey agreement, and the poor conditions at the reception facilities and services.

⁵³ Refugee Support Aegean: *Majority of refugee children in the Aegean Islands Hot Spots are excluded from education.* (News, 16 February 2018).

Available at:

http://rsaagean.org/majority_of_refugee_children_in_the_aegean_islands_hot_spots_are_excluded_from_education/

⁵⁴ European Council for Refugees and Exiles, Greek Council for Refugees: *Country report: Greece (2017 update)*. (March 2018), p. 136.

Available at: http://www.asylumineurope.org/sites/default/files/report-download/aida_gr_2017update.pdf

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 178-180.

The intense clashes at the Moria camp on 25 May 2018 left at least 70 people injured. A group of 900 people, including families with young children, fled violence and sought safety in other areas of Lesbos. Subsequently, despite the efforts of civil society organisations and residents, other facilities have become overcrowded.

*"Around 600 people went to a makeshift camp in the Larsos area, while another 300 were taken to the former PIKPA children's camps. Those who fled the violence at the Moria hotspot, which is hosting numbers three times its capacity, have been told that they will lose their food and financial allowances as well as their appointments with the asylum service if they do not return to the hotspot."*⁵⁷

Pushbacks

*"In February 2018, a report issued by GCR documented a number of complaints of push backs in Evros region. GCR mentioned that allegations of push backs have been consistent and increasing in numbers, referring inter alia to large families, pregnant women, victims of torture and children."*⁵⁸

Acts of xenophobia and racism

On 22 March 2018, an arson attack against the Afghan Migrant and Refugee Community Centre in central Athens took place. An extremist group claimed responsibility for the racist attack.⁵⁹

Turkish soldiers seeking asylum in Greece

The case of eight Turkish military officers who used a military helicopter on 20 July 2016 to flee to Greece following a failed coup has engendered a lot of controversy and affected the diplomatic relations between Greece and Turkey.

Turkey branded the men *traitors* and demanded their extradition that has been so far refused by Greek courts due to doubts the officers would receive a fair trial.⁶⁰ The soldiers denied wrongdoing and expressed fear for their lives.

Tensions between Greece and Turkey have raised in May 2018, after the Council of State (the top administrative court of Greece) rejected an appeal by the government against an administrative decision by an asylum board to grant asylum to one of the Turkish soldiers, and ruled the Turkish soldier should be granted asylum.⁶¹ Two soldiers had been granted asylum by the end of May 2018. The other soldiers' asylum cases are still pending

⁵⁷ European Council of Refugees and Exiles: *Seeking refuge from the hotspots: asylum seekers required to return to Moria despite concerns*. (8 June 2018).

Available at: <https://www.ecre.org/seeking-refuge-from-the-hotspots-asylum-seekers-required-to-return-to-moria-despite-concerns/>

⁵⁸ European Council for Refugees and Exiles, Greek Council for Refugees: *Country report: Greece (2017 update)*. (March 2018), p. 23.

Available at: http://www.asylumineurope.org/sites/default/files/report-download/aida_gr_2017update.pdf

See also:

Greek Council for Refugees: *Reports of systemic pushbacks in the Evros region*. (20 February 2018).

Available at: <https://www.gcr.gr/index.php/en/news/press-releases-announcements/item/790-anafores-gia-systimatikes-epanaprothiseis-ston-evro-apo-eksypiretoymentous-tou-esp>

⁵⁹ UNHCR Greece: *UNHCR condemns attack on Afghan community centre in Athens*. (23 March 2018).

Available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/gr/en/6653-unhcr-condemns-attack-afghan-community-centre-athens.html>

⁶⁰ Deutsche Welle: *17 Turks flee to Greece seeking asylum*. (News, 20 February 2018).

Available at: <http://p.dw.com/p/2szwf>

⁶¹ Reuters: *Top Greek court grants Turkish soldier asylum, rejects government appeal*. (News, 23 May 2018).

Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-security-greece/top-greek-court-grants-turkish-soldier-asylum-rejects-government-appeal-idUSKCN1IO38F>

Trial with five foreign NGO volunteers

On 7 May 2018, the criminal court on Lesbos acquitted three Spanish firemen, members of the NGO Proem-Aid, and two Danes, members of the NGO Team Humanity, who were tried on charges of attempted illegal transport of migrants in Greece.

The five volunteers were arrested by port authority staff on 14 January 2016 on the territorial water borders between Greece and Turkey while trying to help boats with migrants and refugees.⁶²

Controlled centres for migrants

One of the conclusions on migration adopted by the European Council on 28 June 2018 provides for the creation of "*controlled centres*" for migrants.

*"On EU territory, those who are saved, according to international law, should be taken charge of, on the basis of a shared effort, through the transfer in controlled centres set up in Member States, only on a voluntary basis, where rapid and secure processing would allow, with full EU support, to distinguish between irregular migrants, who will be returned, and those in need of international protection, for whom the principle of solidarity would apply. All the measures in the context of these controlled centres, including relocation and resettlement, will be on a voluntary basis, without prejudice to the Dublin reform."*⁶³

The vaguely worded conclusion leaves unclear what the centres will look like, which states might host them, and what the "*principle of solidarity*" will entail in terms of costs and the taking in of refugees.

The proposal, strongly resembling the already existing and criticised hotspots, raises concerns of campaigners and representatives of non-governmental organisations about potential breach of human rights.⁶⁴

⁶² Refugee Support Aegean: *Lesbos Court ruling vindicates five aid workers – saving lives at sea is not a crime.* (News, 8 May 2018).

Available at: <http://rsaegean.org/lesbos-court-ruling-vindicates-five-aid-workers-saving-lives-at-sea-is-not-a-crime/>

⁶³ European Council: *European Council conclusions, 28 June 2018.* (Press release, 29 June 2018).

Available at: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2018/06/29/20180628-euco-conclusions-final/?utm_source=dsms-

[auto&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=European+Council+conclusions%2c+28+June+2018](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2018/06/29/20180628-euco-conclusions-final/?utm_source=dsms-auto&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=European+Council+conclusions%2c+28+June+2018)

⁶⁴ Henley, Jon: *EU's migrant centres could breach human rights, say campaigners.* (The Guardian, 29 June 2018).

Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jun/29/eus-migrant-centres-could-breach-human-rights-say-campaigners>

2. Qualitative research

With the aim to add relevant first-hand information to the desk research, and most importantly to give voice to the ones qualifying as migrants, a plan for a qualitative research had been designed. The research was to be conducted within the city of Athens using semi-structured interview as a research method, as well as participatory observation through daily interaction with the target group and direct or indirect involvement in the pertaining issues discussed in the report, throughout the duration of the European Voluntary Service project (from September 2017 till the end of June 2018 when the current report was being finalised). Attending debates, workshops and keeping oneself informed by studying available materials and following the news and developments in the field of migration have been an inherent part of the process.

As designed prior to the realisation of the interviews, the sample of the participants was to cover different categories of migrants (asylum seekers, refugees, economic migrants, NGO staff, international volunteers in the field of migration), focusing in the first stages on the beneficiaries of NGO Civis Plus afterschool activities, i.e. participants of language lessons provided within the Open Schools Programme of the Municipality of Athens.

In the context of advocacy goals of the project *Rethink Migration*, the findings resulting from the qualitative research were to be incorporated into a list of issues addressed to relevant policy and decision makers and other relevant stakeholders, with the expected outcome of eventual structural changes.

2.1. Outline of the questionnaire

As mentioned above, in the first stages of the qualitative research, interviews were to be conducted with the beneficiaries of the NGO Civis Plus afterschool lessons. Most of the beneficiaries are asylum seekers or persons already granted international protections.

Taking into account this background of the prospective interviewees, the following questionnaire was drafted.

Interview cluster	Project area of focus	Questions	Aim
Individual's legal status, background (country of origin, family, religion, other affiliations,...), migration experience		Can you tell me something about yourself? Where are you from? How old are you? When did you come to Greece? Who did you arrive in Greece with? Is your family here with you? Do you have family members in any other country in Europe? What did your life back in your home country look like? - Further questions building up on the answers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positioning and contextualising (interlocutor, interviewer)
Personal experience and walk through the system and procedures	International protection	Can you tell me more about your experience after you arrived in Greece? What did you do to arrange your stay here? Which people/organisations/institutions did you communicate with? Who did you receive information and assistance from? Who else helped you in any way? What were the challenges you have been facing? What would in your opinion help to improve the situation? - Further questions building up on the answers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exploring how the system/apparatus, i.e. the legislative and institutional frameworks, function in practice Identification of attitudes (those of the interlocutor and authorities) Identification of needs for structural changes

Social relations and networks, agency, opportunities, integration	Participation in social life, Labour market, Education	<p>What does <i>home</i> mean to you? Would you call the place you are currently living at/the country a <i>home</i>? How do you feel living in Greece in general? What does your usual day look like (work, study)? What places do you go to regularly? Where do you go to work/study/relax/meet new people, friends? Why do you like it there? What activities do you engage in? Why?</p> <p>How did you learn about the places you spend your time at (work, studies, hobbies)? Can you tell me more about your friends? Do you speak Greek? How are you learning the language, what/who is helping you? What is your main focus now, what ambitions do you have? How are you achieving your goals? Can you describe a situation/situations in which you felt successful/unsuccessful? Do you feel being part of the society? Have you ever felt discriminated against?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Further questions building up on the answers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of the level of engagement in daily life activities, social events, political events,... • Identification of processes and strategies leading to social networks and support communities formations • Identification of factors hindering and/or contributing to integration of migrants • Identification of interests • Identification of factors hindering and/or contributing to the agency of people with the status of migrants • Identification of issues pertaining to the access to labour market • Identification of issues pertaining to the access to education • Identification of needs for structural changes
Health issues and services	Health services	<p>Can you describe a situation when you had to visit a doctor/a hospital in Greece? Have you faced any problems?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Further questions building up on the answers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of possible problems related to provision of health care services in practice
Living conditions	Accommodation	<p>Can you describe the place you are currently living at? How did you find this place? Who are you living with?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Further questions building up on the answers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of issues pertaining to access to accommodation in practice

Cross-cutting issue: special needs and vulnerable groups (children, persons with disabilities,...)

2.2. Realisation of the research

Research participants

The number of interviewees amounted to 7, 6 of which are female (aged from 26 years to 55 years at the time of the interview) and 1 is male (28 years). As to the countries of origin, 5 respondents are from Ukraine and 2 from Pakistan. At the time of the interview, all but one respondent had been staying in Greece for longer than one year.

Five interviews were conducted in total, two of which were realised with two respondents simultaneously and three with respondents individually.

Research setting

The interview with the respondents from Pakistan was conducted in the premises of NGO Civis Plus, the other interviews in the premises of the Greek Apostolic Exarchate on the Acharnon street in Athens.

All interviews were audio-recorded upon the consent of the interviewees. The interviewees had been informed about the scope and purpose of the research and had been assured of maintaining respondent confidentiality when presenting the findings of the research.

Limitations of the research

The scope of the research and its conduct was in reality restricted by numerous limitations, including refusal of the addressed prospective interviewees to participate, and language barrier preventing reaching out to prospective interviewees and conducting interviews.

Nevertheless, the key factor has been the absence of hands-on involvement and overall leadership on the part of NGO Civis Plus. Winning the trust of the interviewees and conducting interviews with them while being aware of the project's outputs uncertain fate collides with the principles of research and volunteering ethics, including the *do no harm* principle.

2.3. Conclusions: Identified issues and solutions

The following conclusions have been derived from the qualitative research, participant observation, daily interaction with migrants, and overall direct and indirect involvement in the issues discussed in the three reports.

Persons seeking international protection and persons granted international protection

Asylum seekers, including persons whose application has been declined, and persons who have been granted international protection represent the largest group of migrants the authors of the report have been interacting with during their stay in Greece. Often, the needs identified overlap with the solutions suggested.

- Trust
Absence of mutual trust between:
 - individuals addressing administrative services and officials (in particular those of the Asylum Service Office)
 - individuals and interpreters in asylum procedures

and strong need for it to be re-established for the sake of thorough assessment of the grounds of asylum applications

"they don't believe me" (female interviewee, 36 years of age)

"they don't listen properly" (female interviewee, 34 years of age)

"(...)they say it's a personal, not a political issue. My answer was: if I have no problem, why would I leave my country, everything because there is my whole family, my father, my mother, my husband, my own job." (female interviewee, 36 years of age)

- Asylum application processes and other procedures
 - strong need to reduce the inadequately lengthy processes
 - need to increase availability and access to information about the processes and procedures in other languages (being informed and prepared empowers persons in interactions with officials)
- Provision of free legal help and assistance
Strong need for quality free legal help and assistance has been expressed, while acknowledging the role and obligation of the state.

- Interpretation during asylum procedure interviews
 - strong need for the improvement of the quality of interpretation
 - suggestion for putting in place a complaint mechanism regarding the quality of interpreters and interpretation
 - strong need for self-representation: request to have the possibility to represent oneself without an interpreter, and for the right to reject interpretation services to be acknowledged, provided the applicant is able to speak English (identified as a universal language) or Greek

- Access to labour market
 - strong need to increase access to labour market by removing bureaucratic restrictions and limitations, especially in cases of lacking documentation

- Special circumstances
 - childless asylum seeking married couples not being on a priority list and thus losing timely access to services and accommodation, similarly single men
 - individuals “stuck” outside the official administrative framework after having their asylum applications declined and/or waiting for the decision on the appeal (specifically in cases of lack of identity documentation): no access to labour market, accommodation, services
 - individuals with health problems in practice receive only basic health care, there is lack of support and assistance in case of more serious conditions, mental health issues also often not being addressed and/or overlooked

Economic migrants

Although economic reasons may represent a driving factor also for asylum seekers (while not being a ground for granting international protection), information hereinafter is derived only from interactions with persons who have not applied for asylum in Greece, mainly from the Ukrainian participants in the qualitative research

All 5 respondents from Ukraine arrived in Greece because of economic reasons, other benefits (free university studies offered to a certain proportion of foreigners), and/or for reuniting with their close family members. Originally, all of them have migrated to Greece with the perspective of a short-term stay (in terms of a couple of years). Most of them spontaneously used the term *economic migrants* to define themselves or their family members who had come to Greece prior to them.

- Opportunities to learn Greek language
 - need for free Greek language courses

- Access to higher education
 - related to the previous point, access to higher education (particularly universities) is limited by language barrier

- Access to labour market
 - language competency has been identified as key also in better access to labour market
 - the spectrum of professions is for migrants very limited opportunities
 - experience with discrimination due to the status of a foreigner/migrant

"Here in Greece you don't see many distinguishing between what to choose, how to choose. You are very free. That's why, what I was saying, I try to follow them. Really, you, you are free. If you want to do it in that way, nobody will tell you anything. If you want to sit that moment in the street there, you can do and nobody will think even why. It's so amazing. You are doing what you

want, you are free. Maybe...maybe with the racism. It would take place here a little." (female interviewee, 26 years of age)

"In some jobs they were looking at my passport and they would tell me that you are not a Greek people, so we will not...I was passing all the stages of the interviews and on the last stage they learned that I have a Ukrainian passport so I wasn't able to follow the job." (female interviewee, 26 years of age)

- Residence permit procedure
 - accentuated need to legalise one's stay, the problems being the length of the procedure and the obligation to renew the residence permit in relatively short intervals, while often there is different treatment of similar cases (persons within one family coming to Greece at the same time)

"It was really scary not to have the papers, to feel that you are illegally in a country." (female interviewee, 55 years of age) [quotation translated from Greek]

- Bilateral agreements between Greece and the country of origin/country of habitual residence
 - Identified lack of respective bilateral agreements regarding old age pension schemes and the need to deal with this issue
- Personal issues related to adaptation and acculturation, to being independent, and to self-empowerment, as well as long-distance relationships with close family members

"I like Greek people, Greek mentality now and so I like Greece as well. I understand this country now. When I don't understand something or you don't know something you will not like it. When you start to understand how it works, what you need to do, yes, you can go, you can live, you can have fun, you relax. For the time being two countries are my home, Ukraine and Greece." (female interviewee, 26 years of age)

"Sure, the first time it was difficult, but then I went to the city hall and they gave us papers, what papers we need to collect, and then we collected them and went there again. (...) There are also lawyers here who help and do it. I always did it myself. Alright, I told myself, I have university (education), I should know. I like to know something and do it on my own. And as long as I could, I also told my friends what they need to do and how to collect (the papers)." (female interviewee, 55 years of age) [quotation translated from Greek]

- Citizenship and affiliation to the country of origin/country of habitual residence, notion of home
"I feel each country my home." (female interviewee, 26 years of age)

Cross-cutting issues

In most of the interviews, *empowerment and agency* were strongly accentuated. The need for them to be present in one's life was expressed in many ways and forms: representing oneself during the asylum interview without an interpreter, having a job, having access to education, being active and participating in social life, also via volunteering.

Each person enjoys multiple identities and their significance has also been implicitly and explicitly expressed throughout the interviews. However, in the context of arrival and life in Greece, structural categories (such as the type of migrant) imposed on individuals by the socio-political system present the most significant concern as they are afterwards projected to all walks of life, they are key to opening or

closing the doors to enjoying the whole range of human rights, including social, political and economic rights.

In other words, access to the fulfilment of basic needs, access to opportunities, social inclusion and integration, and the freedom of movement among others, are directly dependent on the identity ascribed by the state authorities. In this context, life planning often becomes a luxury, both during the period of waiting for the decision of the authorities (which may be long taking into consideration that the procedures are for various reasons often not taken in timely manner), and after receiving it.

SUMMARY: Identified systemic level issues

- The concept of Turkey as a safe third country is highly debatable, taking into account also the fact that Turkish nationals seek asylum in EU member countries for fear of political persecution. Approximately 1,800 Turkish nationals have sought refuge on the territory of Greece since July 2016.⁶⁵
- Low quality of the management of the administrative procedures / practicalities at the offices
 - organisation of space, order of clients, privacy of information shared and dealt with
 - soft skills of the staff and their attitude to clients
 - on the individual staff level: prioritising based on personal relations and ethnic profiling resulting in discriminatory behaviour, and as the staff is part of the institutional framework, also in institutional violence; different decisions issued in similar cases
- Absence of accessible and reliable information as a newcoming migrant (e.g. what are the respective steps in the procedures in applying for asylum, applying for residence permit, information where to look for accommodation, basic rules to get by in everyday life, etc.)
 - it is important that information is made more accessible – in terms of language, availability online
 - migrants are empowered in interactions with officials provided they have prior relevant information about the procedures and their respective rights; it also reduces the risk of receiving incomplete or false information from one particular official they end up dealing with; and it eliminates the inequality created by different positions of power of the two parties (migrant/client versus official)
- Accommodation facilities
 - limited capacities
 - special cases of individuals not considered to be ‘vulnerable’: childless married couples, and single young men who are not entitled to priority treatment, as well as lack of accommodation facilities designated for these beneficiaries
- Administrative procedures impeded particularly in cases of migrants (asylum seekers or residence permit applicants) lacking identity documents issued by their country of origin/country of habitual residence, the situation often aggravated by the fact that their country of origin/country of habitual residence does not have a permanent diplomatic mission established in Greece
- Absence of bilateral agreements regarding portability of social security benefits, primarily old age pension between Greece and other non-EU third countries
- Limitation in access to labour market, health services, education
 - not removing unnecessary bureaucratic requirements will perpetuate destitution of the persons affected and in the long run will create society-wide burdens

⁶⁵ Deutsche Welle: *17 Turks flee to Greece seeking asylum*. (News, 20 February 2018). Available at: <http://p.dw.com/p/2szwf>

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4. Appendices

Refugee and asylum case law:

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About Erasmus+

Erasmus+ is the EU funding programme for education, training, youth and sport 2014-2020. Erasmus+ combines previous funding programmes in the sector, including the Lifelong Learning Programme (Comenius, Leonardo, Erasmus, Grundtvig and Transversal Programmes), Youth in Action and five international cooperation programmes (Erasmus Mundus, Tempus, Alfa, Edulink and the programme for cooperation with industrialised countries). This makes it easier for applicants to understand the opportunities available, while other simplifications facilitate access. Erasmus+ has three main targets: two-thirds of the budget is allocated to learning opportunities abroad for individuals, within the EU and beyond; the remainder supports partnerships between educational institutions, youth organisations, businesses, local and regional authorities and NGOs, as well as reforms to modernise education and training and to promote innovation, entrepreneurship and employability.

What is EVS?

The European Voluntary Service (EVS) forms part of ERASMUS+, a European Union programme that promotes the mobility of young people through international activities with a non-formal education dimension such as youth exchanges, voluntary services, youth initiatives and training of youth workers. EVS offers young people the opportunity to volunteer up to twelve months in another country. A wide variety of placements can be found in the social, cultural, environmental, and sports sector. EVS provides the funding to cover the volunteer's costs.



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