

RESPOND

Working Papers

Global Migration: Consequences and Responses

Paper 2020/53, June 2020

Integration Policies, Practices and Experiences

Greece Country Report

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Reference: RESPOND D5.3

This research was conducted under the Horizon 2020 project ‘RESPOND Multilevel Governance of Migration and Beyond’ (770564).

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To be cited as: Leivaditi, N., Papatzani, E., Ilias, A. and Petracou, E. (2020) “Integration: Policy, Practices and Experiences. Greece Country report”, RESPOND Working Papers, Global Migration: Consequences and Responses (#770564, Horizon2020) Report Series, University of the Aegean.

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RESPOND: Multilevel
Governance of Migration in
Europe and Beyond (770564)



Co-funded by the Horizon 2020 programme
of the European Union

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List of abbreviations

AAU: Autonomous Asylum Units

AIDA: Asylum Information Database

AMIF: Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund

AMKA: Social Security Number

CEAS: Common European Asylum System

DYEP: Programme of afternoon preparatory classes (*Δομές Υποδοχής και Εκπαίδευσης Προσφύγων*)

EASO: European Asylum Support Office

ECHR: European Court of Human Rights

ESTIA: Emergency Support to Integration and Accommodation Programme

FILOXENIA: Temporary Shelter and Protection for the Most Vulnerable Migrants in Greece

FRS: First Reception Service

GCA: Greece Cash Alliance

GCR: Greek Council of Refugees

HELIOS: Hellenic Integration Support for Beneficiaries of International Protection

ILC: Integration Learning Centre

IOM: International Organisation for Migration

KEELPNO: Centre for Disease Control and Prevention

MIC: Migrants Integration Council

MICe: Migrants Integration Centres

NGOs: Non-Governmental Organisations

PHILOS: Emergency health response to refugee crisis

RAO: Regional Asylum Office

RIC: Reception and Identification Centre

RIS: Reception and Identification Service

SSI: Social Solidarity Income

TCN: Third-country nationals

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to acknowledge the support and assistance of the lawyer Evangelia Tsomaka for the review of the legal framework. Additionally, Anna Holloway for her rigorous language editing. Many thanks also to George Kapasakali and Anastasia Nella for transcribing the interviews. The authors are also grateful to the work package #5 leaders Naures Atto (University of Cambridge) and Onver Cetrez (Uppsala University) for their constructive comments on earlier versions of this report. Last but not least, we would also like to thank the many interviewees who shared their rich experiences, observations and thoughts about integration in Greece.

About the project

RESPOND is a Horizon 2020 project that aims at studying the multilevel governance of migration in Europe and beyond. The consortium is formed of 14 partners from 11 source, transit and destination countries and is coordinated by Uppsala University in Sweden. The main aim of this Europe-wide project is to provide an in-depth understanding of the governance of recent mass migration at macro, meso and micro levels through cross-country comparative research and to critically analyse governance practices with the aim of enhancing the migration governance capacity and policy coherence of the European Union (EU), its Member States and third countries.

RESPOND will study migration governance through a narrative which is constructed along five thematic fields:

- (1) Border management and security,
- (2) Refugee protection regimes,
- (3) Reception policies,
- (4) Integration policies, and
- (5) Conflicting Europeanisation.

Each thematic field reflects a juncture in the migration journey of refugees and is designed to provide a holistic view of policies, their impact and the responses given by affected actors.

In order to better approach these themes, we divided our research into work packages (WPs). The present report is concerned with the findings related to WP5, which focuses specifically on refugee integration.

Executive summary

This report is part of the fifth Work Package of RESPOND and deals with issues related to refugee integration, aiming to present and discuss legislative measures and policies, the integration practices followed by state and non-state actors and the experiences of asylum seekers and refugees with regards to integration in Greece in the period 2011-2019. The report draws from the EU principles and key policy priorities on integration as they are shaped through a) the “Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy in the EU” which were adopted by the Justice and Home Affairs Council in November 2004 and b) the 2016 “Action Plan on the Integration of Third-country Nationals” that sets out policy priorities and the tools to support their implementation.

The political and social context of the period in question is determined by both the multilevel socioeconomic recession in Greece and the increase in refugee arrivals. Despite the fact that Greece has been a reception country for immigrants since the 1990s, no official integration policy was planned and implemented until recently. In spring 2015, as a result of wars (mainly in Syria) and of the overall adverse conditions prevailing in other countries, refugees mostly from Syria but also from Iraq, Afghanistan, Eritrea and Somalia, started to enter Greece in larger numbers. These developments have strengthened the character of Greece as a first-reception and transit country. The Migration and Social Integration Code (Law 4251/2014) is currently the basic law regulating integration in Greece, and it has addressed issues pertaining to residence permits and access to the labour market. Furthermore, two national strategies for the integration of third-country nationals were launched in 2013 and 2018 respectively.

The research methodology used for this report has combined diverse methods. The review of the national legislation on integration issues was accompanied by a review of a series of reports by national and international organisations and NGOs. The practices of integration are analysed on the basis of the empirical material assembled during qualitative field research conducted mainly in Lesbos (and to a lesser extent in Athens) in the period June-December 2018 at a meso and micro level. The meso level included 15 semi-structured interviews with executives and employees of the authorities, international organisations and NGOs. As for the micro level, 34 semi-structured interviews were conducted with asylum seekers and refugees living in the Moria Hotspot and in Athens, including a focus-group interview.

The report is structured in seven sections. In the first section we outline the Greek integration policy by looking at the legal, political and institutional framework. The five sections that follow discuss the main aspects of integration, namely Labour Market, Education, Housing and Spatial Integration, Psychosocial health and Citizenship, Belonging and Civic Participation. In these sections an emphasis is given on the meso and micro level research material gathered from the semi-structured interviews of actors and refugees and asylum seekers respectively. The report concludes with specific insights emerging from the analysis, as well as with policy recommendations.

Introduction

This report is part of the fifth work package of RESPOND (“Multilevel governance of mass migration in Europe and beyond”) and focuses on refugee integration policies and practices in the period 2011-2019 in Greece. The main goal of this report is to present and discuss the legislative measures and policies, the integration practices followed by state and non-state agencies and the experiences of asylum seekers and refugees with regards to integration policy, practice and experience in Greece. Following the WP1, WP2, WP3 and WP4 reports that focus on the “Legal & Policy Framework of Migration Governance”, “Border Management and Migration Controls in Greece”, “Refugee Protection” and “Refugee Reception” respectively, this report will concentrate on Refugee Integration. The analysis is based on both a review of the legal framework and published reports on integration and on the basis of the gathered empirical data on the experiences, perceptions and actions of actors, asylum seekers and refugees.

The notion of integration is highly contested within both policy debate and academic literature. This RESPOND report on integration draws from the EU principles and key policy priorities on integration as they are shaped through a) the “Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy in the EU” which were adopted by the Justice and Home Affairs Council in November 2004 and form the foundations of EU initiatives in the field of integration (European Commission, 2004) and b) the 2016 “Action Plan on the Integration of Third-country Nationals” that sets out policy priorities and the tools to support their implementation (European Commission, 2016).

In academic circles, the notion of “integration” has been widely debated and there have been many attempts to provide an appropriate definition (Ager and Strang, 2008; Penninx and Garcés-Mascreñas, 2016; Schinkel, 2018). Recently, the notion has also been criticised by scholars working on refugee issues (Mavrommatis, 2018). The major point of criticism is the fact that “integration” (following the concept of “assimilation”) continues to assume that immigrants as a minority must conform to the norms and values of the dominant majority in order to be accepted (Penninx and Garcés-Mascreñas, 2016). Scholars have argued that integration as a process should not be considered as a linear path along which the minority group is supposed to change most of the time, while the majority culture is thought to remain the same. A lot of criticism has also been based on the way that the “majority” of society is understood, and scholars have argued that this “society” is not a homogenous whole (Schinkel, 2018).

Additionally, a wide range of academic contributions have tried to provide a more satisfying definition of the term, as well as the dimensions through which integration takes place and should be investigated. Ager and Strang (2008) for example, argue that the key domains of integration are related to four themes: achievement and access in the sectors of employment, housing, education and health; the assumptions and practices regarding citizenship and rights; the processes of social connection within and between groups of the community; and the structural barriers to such connection related to language, culture and the local environment (Ager and Strang, 2008). Penninx and Garcés-Mascreñas (2016) have built on an open, non-normative analytical definition of integration as “the process of becoming an accepted part of society”. They propose a disaggregated approach to the concept of integration, distinguishing three dimensions (the legal-political, the socioeconomic, and the cultural-religious), two parties (the immigrants and the receiving society), and three levels

(individuals, organisations, and institutions) while, for the study of integration policies, they suggest taking into account policy frames, concrete policy measures and both the vertical and horizontal aspects of integration policymaking (Penninx and Garcés-Mascreñas, 2016).

In Greece, the political and social context of the period in question is determined by both the multilevel socioeconomic recession and the increase in refugee arrivals. Despite the fact that Greece has been a reception country for immigrants since the 1990s, no official integration policy was planned and implemented until recently. In spring 2015, as a result of the war in Syria and of the overall adverse conditions prevailing in other countries, refugees mostly from Syria but also from Iraq, Afghanistan, Eritrea and Somalia, started to enter Greece in larger numbers. In 2015 alone, more than 850,000 migrants made the crossing to Greece in an attempt to make their way to other EU countries. These developments have strengthened the character of Greece as a transit and first-reception country.

The Migration and Social Integration Code (Law 4251/2014) is currently the basic law that regulates integration, aiming at the consolidation of the provisions of immigration legislation; the harmonisation with European law and the rationalisation of the existing institutional framework; and the treatment of malfunctions identified in the implementation of existing legislation. The Code addresses issues related to residence permits and access to the labour market and establishes a protection framework of rights for migrants. Additionally, Law 4375/2016, which mainly determines asylum and protection issues for asylum seekers, also raises some issues related to integration. Furthermore, two national strategies for the integration of third-country nationals were drawn in April 2013 and June 2018 respectively. The latter provides for an integration policy that is a process formed around both reception (which applies to applicants of international protection) and integration (which applies to beneficiaries of international protection and to migrants).

The present report is structured in seven sections. In the first section we outline the Greek integration policy by looking at the legal, political and institutional framework. The five sections that follow discuss the main aspects of integration, namely Labour Market, Education, Housing and Spatial Integration, Psychosocial Health, and Citizenship, Belonging and Civic Participation. In these sections the emphasis is on the meso and micro level research material gathered from the semi-structured interviews with stakeholders and refugees and asylum seekers respectively. The report concludes with specific insights emerging from the analysis, as well as with some policy recommendations.

Methodology and Sources

The research methodology used in this report combines diverse methods and data from a variety of sources in order to provide comprehensive insights to regulations, policies, practices and experiences of integration in Greece. Both Section 1 “Integration Policies: Legal, Political and Institutional Framework” and the regulatory level of each integration dimension (analysed in sections 2-6) are based on desk research on legislation, policy documents and reports by national and international organisations and NGOs.

In addition, the report draws from semi-structured interviews with actors involved in different dimensions of integration, specifically through meso-level interviews. These interviews are also used to account for the implementation of each integration dimension that is analysed in Sections 2-6. More specifically, the meso-level included 15 semi-structured interviews with executives and employees of the authorities, international organisations and NGOs. Additionally, a round-table discussion organised by the University of the Aegean working group in November 2018 provided crucial insights to the research. Fifteen representatives of eight stakeholders of Lesbos (NGOs and International Agencies) participated in the round table. In addition, 34 semi-structured have been conducted with refugees and asylum seekers from various countries of origin who live in Moria Hotspot and in Athens (arrived between 2011 and 2017), including a focus group interview. The focus-group interview was held with five asylum seekers who had the role of community leaders in Moria Hotspot, on Lesbos island. Four of them were men, and one was a woman, while two of them were from Iran and the others from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq. As regards the 34 semi-structured interviews, the sample was approached using the snowball method. The interviewees were aware of the aims of this research and their anonymity and desire to speak off the record at certain moments of the interview were respected. Twelve interviewees were of Afghan origin, of which eight were raised in other countries such as Iran or Pakistan. Eight came from Syria, including three Kurds. Additionally, there was a wide range of interviewees from other countries of origin such as Burundi (two interviewees), Iraq (two interviewees), Somalia (two interviewees), Iran, Palestine, Cameroon, Congo, Eritrea, Guinea and Sudan. The proportion of men and women interviewees was: 75.75% males (25 in absolute numbers), 9.1% women (three in absolute numbers), 15.15% couples (five in absolute numbers) and one group interview (with both men and a woman). Most interviewees were in the age group 18-37, with some exceptions of older individuals. The list of the micro-level interviewees with pseudonyms and personal information is provided in Table 6 in Appendices.

Specific limitations emerged regarding the empirical data on integration gathered from the aforementioned sample. Due to the fact that our research focused on the island of Lesbos (reception area) where the vast majority of interviewees both reside in Moria Hotspot and are asylum seekers (having arrived either before or after 2015), their experiences and perceptions were not directly relevant to integration dimensions. The fact that they live in Moria Hotspot, in some cases under the geographical restriction of movement, determined their experiences and trajectories. The majority of their life histories and experiences were related to issues of borders, asylum, protection and reception already analysed in the WP’s 2-4 reports. However, beyond the methodological limitations that derive from this fact, the crucial problems and shortcomings of the integration policy in Greece as well as the differences in the governance of integration at different (spatial) levels do emerge. All the same, in specific cases of this

report where the interview material is not capable of covering the issues analysed, we draw from other published reports and data available.

The qualitative analysis of the interview material was conducted using NVivo software and organised on the basis of the major research themes of RESPOND (such as borders, protection, reception and integration). The NVivo material regarding Integration was specifically used for the needs of this report. Despite the usefulness of NVivo for the qualitative analysis of large numbers of interviews, it should be mentioned that in some cases the use of this kind of software has specific limitations. For example, in our case study, the exported nodes sometimes removed the personal history of interviewees. Thus, in some cases, it was necessary to re-incorporate information from the interview transcriptions – and not only from the nodes exported through NVivo – in order to take into account the specific context of the interviewee's experiences, perceptions and practices.

1. Integration Policies: Legal, Political and Institutional Framework

In this section, the legal, political and institutional framework of integration policies in Greece is analysed. More specifically, the historical background of Greek integration policies is presented, followed by the presentation of the legal and political framework of immigrant integration and the recent policies and programs for the integration of beneficiaries of international protection. Additionally, the legal framework of the multiple dimensions of integration is discussed, namely labour, education, housing, psychosocial health and citizenship. Last but not least, aspects of governance of integration policies are presented, and more specifically, the governance actors involved and the governance of integration at the local level.

1.1. The Historical Background of Greek Integration Policies

Greece's policy for migrant integration has been criticised over the past years for not offering lasting solutions to third-country nationals. Nevertheless, during the last 15 years there have been specific developments in the legal framework for the integration of asylum seekers and third-country nationals who have been granted the status of international or subsidiary protection.

The idea of a defined regulatory context for the comprehensive social integration of third-country nationals in Greece was first introduced back in 2005 with Law 3386/2005, entitled “Entry, accommodation and social integration of third-country nationals in the Greek territory”, whose art.66 par.4 foresaw the following conditions for the integration of third-country nationals: a) certified knowledge of the Greek language, b) successful participation in introductory courses on the history, culture and lifestyle of Greek society, c) integration into the Greek labour market and d) active social participation. Law 3386/2005 also provided for the operation of the Council of Migrants Integration (SEM), an institution in Greek municipalities that promoted the meaningful and equal participation of migrants in the decision-making process at the local level. Specifically, its role is to identify integration problems faced by third-country nationals legally residing in various municipalities and submit recommendations and proposals to the municipal councils concerning the development of local actions for the smooth integration of migrants in local societies, while Law 3536/2007 foresaw the establishment of a national committee for the social integration of migrants and further regulative procedures for the provision of residence permits to third-country nationals.

Moreover, Greece introduced two national integration strategies for third-country nationals as a result of the 2011 European Agenda for the Integration of Third-Country Citizens, which called for an enhanced and coherent approach to integration in various policy areas at the government level. It is noted that in June 2016, in the light of new developments, the European Commission updated the Action Plan on the Integration of Third-country Citizens, once again stressing the need for a holistic approach to the management of the migration phenomenon at the European level. The first National Integration Strategy for third-country nationals was implemented in April 2013, while the second strategy was introduced in June 2018 and officially published in January 2019 (European Commission, 2020).

The 2013 National Integration Strategy had the following three objectives as part of the general migration policy: a) the rational management of migration flows, b) the management of legal migration based on the needs of the labour market and c) the smooth social and cultural integration of migrants, based on the principles and values of the Hellenic Republic. The strategy was based on the selective migration model and on the principle of benefit-return, which advocates preference for migrants who have a range of qualitative characteristics in relation to the amount of the social capital that each migrant can offer to Greece. This strategy emerged in response to an EU request for the creation of national strategies by all Member States with a view to reaffirming the relevance between the strategic objectives and actions of the EU, as well as the detection of policy axes to finance the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) for the 2014-2020 period (Ministry of Interior, 2013).

The 2018 National Integration Strategy was based on the following: the conclusions of the Council of Ministers of Europe on Integration under the Greek Presidency of the Union (June 2014), the recent Action Plan on the Integration of Third-Country Citizens of the European Commission, the multiannual programme of the AMIF, the national legislation on inclusion contained in the Migration and Social Inclusion Code (Law 4251/2014), as well as the establishment of a Ministry of Migration Policy, which brought together all the relevant services. The strategy proposed and promoted a new model of inclusion which was based on the social model of integration and was adapted to the dynamic and peculiarities of the Greek society and state. Specifically, it aimed at creating and maintaining an open society that respects diversity, safeguarding the rights and obligations of the persons residing in Greece. The strategy fosters interaction, collaboration and dialogue between different communities (national, cultural, etc.) and enhances mutual understanding, acceptance and social cohesion by promoting the development of the host country (Ministry of Migration Policy, 2018).

The 2018 Strategy mentioned that, for it to be successfully implemented, local communities must assume a significant role in the process of integration. In an effort to decentralize the implementation process, local governments were designated as the main executive mechanism of the integration initiatives and played a key role in the development of integration policies under the supervision and coordination of the central government administration; this also promoted cooperation between them. Furthermore, the Strategy foresaw the active participation and contribution of civil society, including migrant and refugee associations, NGOs and UN agencies, in the implementation of the planned reception and integration actions.

The Strategy identifies access to the education system, the labour market and public services, among others, as important components of the integration of immigrants and beneficiaries of international protection. It addresses the integration policy as a multidimensional process of different speeds revolving around two levels: 1. Reception, which applies to applicants of international protection and where the state is called upon to provide protection as well as basic material reception conditions (such as housing, financial assistance, access to health, etc.) immediately after the identification procedure at the entry points. The actions and measures taken in this context lay the foundations for the smooth integration of the population into the host society and act as an instance of early integration. 2. Integration, which applies to beneficiaries of international protection and to migrants, whereby the state is called upon to secure all the prerequisites for their successful integration into society (such as housing, livelihood and access to the labour market, health, education, social participation, valid information). Actions and measures fostering integration vary and are related to the

specific needs of each group. Integration aims at a smooth transition from protection status to inclusion in the host society.

However, the Strategy is mainly a roadmap with integration proposals rather than an explicit commitment of the state to implement the suggested policies. At the same time, practical challenges such as the incapacity of the public sector to address specific needs, the absence of intercultural approaches in welfare services, the lack of durable funding and the fragmented and project-based nature of interventions remain the main obstacles impeding the strategy's proper implementation at various levels.

Finally, since 2011 Greece has been facing critical challenges in terms of policy implementation due to political and financial instability. In the years 2015-2016 the increased refugee arrivals in Greece (a country that until then had a weak reception and asylum system and, at the same time, faced significant limitations in its health and welfare sector) led to the EU-Turkey Statement of 18 March 2016. The Statement resulted in a geographical restriction of the freedom of movement of asylum seekers to the Greek islands, leading to their general entrapment in Greece and further hindering the integration of refugees and asylum seekers in the country.

1.2. Legal and Political Framework of Immigrant Integration

Overview

The Migration and Social Integration Code (Law 4251/2014) is currently the basic law regulating integration, drafted with the purpose of: a) consolidating the provisions of immigration legislation, b) becoming harmonised with European law and c) rationalising the existing institutional framework and the treatment of malfunctions identified in the implementation of existing legislation. In particular, the Migration and Social Integration Code further simplified the procedures for issuing residence permits, reduced the categories of residence permits and increased their duration. Moreover, the conditions for accessing the labour market were reviewed and the obtention of long-term resident status was facilitated. The Code also established a protective framework for the rights of beneficiaries in accordance with the principles of equality and non-discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, language or religion and with respect for social justice, with a particular focus on children's rights. In addition, there has been a change in the terms and conditions for accessing long-term residence permits, with a view to promoting this type of status.

Law 4375/2016 art. 31 further strengthened the importance attached to issues of social inclusion through the re-establishment of the Directorate for Social Inclusion, which aims to study, plan and implement the integration policy for beneficiaries of international protection and migrants on Greek territory. In addition, according to Law 4375/2016 art. 22, the General Secretary of Public Order of the Ministry of Interior and Administrative Reconstruction grants residence permits on humanitarian grounds to applicants for international protection holding an asylum seeker card in force and whose application had been lodged up to five years before the entry into force of the law and is pending examination in second instance.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Migration Policy was established with Presidential Decree 123/2016, aiming at the administrative, institutional and symbolic upgrading of the management of migration, asylum and the promotion of the social integration of refugees and migrants. The Ministry of Migration Policy has today been replaced by the Ministry of Migration

and Asylum. P.D. 122/2017 established the Directorate for the Protection of Asylum seekers, in charge of implementing the national policy for the reception of applicants for international protection, in particular through the design, monitoring and implementation of protection programmes, placing particular emphasis on vulnerable groups. P.D. 122/2017 founded the Strategic Planning Council within the Ministry of Migration Policy as a consultation body on issues pertaining to the formulation, monitoring and evaluation of public policies.

Integration Support for Beneficiaries of International Protection

At present, the framework for the integration of beneficiaries of international or subsidiary protection is drawn by the provisions of Law 4375/2016 and Law 4636/2019. Additionally, as a reflection of the Integration Strategy, the Greek Government designed the National Integration Programme HELIOS, implemented since July 2019 by IOM and several project partners and funded by DG HOME of the European Commission. HELIOS Programme is a pilot integration project that aims to support the integration of beneficiaries of international protection (refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection) into Greek society. The project offers services promoting independent living, including rental subsidies, integration courses, employability support and integration monitoring. Eligible candidates to the HELIOS project must be beneficiaries of international protection and have been granted this status after 1 January 2018; they must also be officially registered and reside in an Open Accommodation Centre, a Reception and Identification Centre (RIC), a hotel of the IOM FILOXENIA project or a form of accommodation provided by the ESTIA programme at the moment of enrolment in the project; furthermore, they must have complied with the instructions received by UNHCR, RIS and/or the Site Management Support actors concerning their requested exit from Open Accommodation Centres, RICs, hotels of the IOM FILOXENIA project or of the ESTIA programme (IOM, 2019).

Legislative Reforms

Many legislative initiatives have been launched over the years 2011-2019 to strengthen the institutional framework. Some of the latest reforms at the government level aim to provide a relevant policy baseline for a holistic approach to immigrants' integration. Specifically, the establishment of the National Mechanism for the Monitoring and Evaluation of Social Inclusion and Social Cohesion Policies (Law 4445/2016) reinforced the 2018 Integration Strategic Plan. In addition, the establishment of the National Council against Racism and Intolerance (Law 4356/2015) placed a public national authority in charge of preventing and combatting racism and intolerance so as to ensure the protection of individuals and groups such as refugees, who are targeted because of their race, colour, ethnicity, social origin, religious or other beliefs, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender characteristics. Another important step for the enhancement of the integration policy during this period was the establishment of the Government Council on Social Policy according to Cabinet Act 38 of 2-11-2015 (A'137), as it was amended by Cabinet Act 3 of 24-1-2017 (A8) (Ministry of Migration Policy, 2018), with the tasks of specification of the government council on social policy.

The Legal Framework of the Multiple Dimensions of Integration

Specific legislative provisions apply to the different dimensions of integration, as analysed in this report.

Labour

According to article 71 of Law 4375/2016 and article 15 of Law 4540/2018 (transposition of article 15 of the Reception Conditions Directive), asylum seekers have immediate access to the labour market as employees or service or work providers from the moment they lodge an asylum application and are provided with an asylum seeker card. This legal framework facilitated the access of asylum seekers to the labour market; before its adoption, asylum seekers had to obtain a work permit, which was granted following a labour market test giving priority to Greek and EU citizens and persons of Greek origin (Presidential Decrees 189/1998, 220/2007). Law 4636/2019, adopted in November 2019 and in force since January 2020, marked a step backwards with regards to the access of asylum seekers to the labour market. It introduced a six-month time limit before access to the labour market is granted to applicants (art 53) and it repealed the relevant provisions of Law 4540/2018 (transposition of the Reception Conditions Directive). As a result, under the newly established legal framework, the access of asylum seekers to employment is restricted and their possibility to be self-sufficient and independent from the country's strained reception system is seriously hampered. As for beneficiaries of international protection (refugees and subsidiary protection beneficiaries), they have access to wage employment or self-employment on the same terms and conditions that apply for Greek citizens, provided they hold a valid residence permit (art 69 of Law 4375/2016). The same status remained under newly adopted Law 4636/2019 (art 27). Before Law 4375/2016, refugees benefited from integration policies under the same terms as legally residing third-country nationals (Presidential Decree 141/2013, Law 4251/2014) and had the obligation to obtain a work permit in order to access the labour market (Ministerial Circular 17131/313/12-04-2016).

Beneficiaries of international protection are treated in the same way as Greek nationals in relation to the recognition of foreign diplomas, certificates and proof of formal qualifications; if they cannot provide evidence, the relevant Greek authorities should facilitate the process (art 29 of Presidential Decree 141/2013). Law 4540/2018 provides that the conditions for the assessment of the skills of asylum seekers who do not have the necessary documentation will be set by a Joint Ministerial Decision (art 16). The same provision was included in Law 4636/2019 (art 54). Such a decision has not been issued and, therefore, no officially regulated procedure is in place for the validation of skills either.

Education

According to article 28 of newly established Law 4636/2019, children beneficiaries of international protection have the same obligation to attend public primary and secondary education units as nationals; if they do not comply, sanctions may be imposed on their parents. According to article 51, children asylum seekers have the same obligation; the authorities are obliged to provide necessary and adequate means to facilitate the procedure. If their enrolment is not completed within three months from their registration, they may be deprived from reception conditions and administrative sanctions may be imposed on their parents. According to article 52, access to secondary education is not only limited to children but also guaranteed to adult asylum seekers.

Law 4415/2016 regulates the issues of education in the Greek language and intercultural education. Based on Law (art 38), which took into consideration the specific characteristics of the refugee population (mobility, time of arrival and duration of stay) and the size of the student population, Reception/Preparatory Structures for the Education of Refugees (DYEP) were

formed for the first time in 2016 (Common Ministerial Decision 152360/ΓΔ4/2016). Law 4547/2018 (Chapter 7) further regulated the issue of the Structures. Reception/Preparatory Structures for the Education of Refugees (DYEP) were also formed for the current academic year with a Common Ministerial Decision issued in October 2019 (Decision 147357/Δ1/2019).

At present, the Reception/Preparatory Structures (DYEP) are integrated within school units of the primary and secondary education system and include specified preparatory study courses of a short duration for children aged 4-15 years old. The educational programme aims to facilitate the integration of refugee and migrant children into the educational process in a way that will gradually allow them to join mainstream classes in Greek schools. The implementation of the programme's first year entailed a weekly educational session of twenty hours covering four main subjects: Greek, Mathematics, English and Information Technology. Arts and sporting activities were also included.

In this context, education may be provided to refugees either through the school units of primary and secondary education of the mainstream education system – namely, to children living in dispersed urban settings and enrolling in morning classes of public schools near their place of residence, alongside Greek children – or through the Reception Structures (DYEP), which operate in the framework of the mainstream education system, as afternoon preparatory classes taking place in public schools, neighbouring camps or hotspots, for children aged 4-15 years old (AIDA, 2020). The classes take place after the morning classes for Greek children have been completed.

In addition, based on Law 3879/2010 (art 26), Reception Classes were created in areas characterised as Zones of Educational Priority (ZEP), as part of the formal educational system. The Zones of Educational Priority (ZEP) aim to enhance active participation and effective learning among primary and secondary education students who do not have the required level of attainment in Greek, including refugee students, in order to integrate them into the Greek education system (Karzi and Tselepi, 2018). Such classes have been in operation in certain public primary and secondary schools since 2010. The classes are integrated in the mainstream education system and are attended by the students in parallel, alongside Greek students. The schools where Reception Classes are currently operating are specified by Ministerial Decisions Φ1/108909/Δ1/2019 and Φ1/170112/Δ1/2019.

As far as adult education is concerned, according to article 28 of P.D 141/2013 (and art. 28 of new Law 4636/2019), beneficiaries of international protection have the right to participate in educational programmes for adults related to employment and vocational training under the same terms and conditions applicable to Greek nationals. The same right is guaranteed for asylum seekers (art 54 of Law 4636/2019). Lastly, there are no specific provisions facilitating the access of refugees to higher education in Greece. They may access universities under the same conditions as Greek nationals, upon participation in entry examinations organised by the Greek state. Law 4415/2016 describes the documentation that must be submitted by third-country nationals who have attended education in their country of origin and wish to participate in the procedure.

Housing

According to P.D 141/2014 art 33, beneficiaries of international protection are provided with the necessary assistance in matters of housing under the conditions applicable to Greek citizens (transposition of art 32 of the Reception Conditions Directive), taking into account the

need to ensure equal opportunities for access to accommodation. The same provision was included in Law 4636/2019. Nevertheless, in terms of housing, relevant policies in Greece have always been marginal: unlike other European countries, Greece had never implemented or even designed a social housing policy (Emmanuel, 2006). The urban development of the large Greek cities evolved without central planning and was determined by specific land policies and housing production mechanisms that resulted in high levels of home ownership (Balampanidis et al., 2019). In Greece, the percentage of the population residing in a privately owned residence was 77.2% in 1991, 75.9% in 2011, and 73.5% in 2018 (Eurostat, 2019). At the same time, the favour shown by the Greek state towards home ownership has not been accompanied by a policy of tenant protection or a social housing policy, which is literally non-existent until today. As Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas mention, the choice of a non-policy response should be understood as a policy in itself (Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas, 2016, p.20). The economic crisis of 2008 also had a significant effect on housing, to the extent that the term “housing crisis” is still discussed until today. Specific aspects of the “housing crisis” currently prevail, such as housing insecurity, energy poverty (Chatzikonstantinou and Vatavali, 2016), over-indebted households, auctions and increasing homelessness (Balampanidis, Patatouka, and Siatitsa, 2013). Generally speaking, the impact of the crisis on housing was crucial, mostly due to the lack of a relevant policy in the country.

As analysed in detail in Section 5, two housing programmes for asylum seekers and recognised refugees have been planned and implemented in Greece in recent years. The first is the UNHCR “Emergency Support to Integration and Accommodation Programme” (ESTIA) implemented since mid-2016 and regulated by Ministerial Decision No. 6382/2019 of 12 March 2019 “Determination of framework materializing the programme providing financial assistance and shelter ESTIA, Official Gazette 853/ B/12.03.2019”. The programme benefits asylum seekers considered vulnerable and was implemented as an alternative measure to reception conditions. The “Hellenic Integration Support for Beneficiaries of International Protection” (HELIOS) constitutes the first integration housing programme in Greece, implemented since 2019. It provides an alternative temporary solution to beneficiaries of international protection who have been granted this status after January 2018, and aims at supporting the integration of the latter and of beneficiaries of subsidiary protection into Greek society by promoting independent living through the provision of rental subsidies, vocational courses and employability support.

Psychosocial Health

According to P.D 141/2013 art. 31 par. 1 (art 30 of the directive 2011/95/EU) titled “Healthcare”, beneficiaries of international protection have access to medical care under the same conditions as Greek citizens. Moreover, par. 2 mentions that beneficiaries of international protection who have special needs, shall receive adequate medical care, including treatment for mental disabilities where required, under the conditions applicable to Greek citizens. In particular, these beneficiaries include pregnant women, disabled people, victims of torture, rape or other serious forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence or minors who have been victims of any form of abuse, neglect, exploitation, torture, inhuman or degrading treatment or who have suffered because of armed conflict. The same provision was included in Law 4636/2019.

Applicants for international protection have the right to free access to public health services and to nursing and health care, including the necessary treatment for diseases and mental health care. According to the new law 4636/2019 art. 55 on healthcare needs,

applicants for international protection shall be attributed a temporary number of insurance and foreign health care (P.A.A.Y.P.A.) so as to access health services, the labour market and social security. The P.A.A.Y.P.A. shall be given at the same time as the number indicated in the asylum seeker card issued by the Asylum Service and will remain active throughout the examination of the application for asylum. The holder of the P.A.A.Y.P.A. has access to health services under the conditions described in art. 33 of Law 4368/2016. If the application for asylum is rejected for any of the reasons set out in the law without suspensory effect, the P.A.A.Y.P.A. shall be automatically deactivated and the beneficiary ceases to have access to the above services.

Citizenship

In Greece, the term citizenship (or nationality) refers to the legal link that connects the individual with the country where he or she belongs, while the term ethnicity refers to a non-legal bond of a person with a particular nation. Greek nationality has been based predominantly on the *jus sanguinis* principle. Those belonging to the same nation are regarded as part of a homogeneous whole, while the rest are referred to as aliens or third-country nationals. The Greek migration policy, initially implemented through ad hoc regularisation programmes aimed at the legalisation of the status of undocumented foreigners who had entered the country since 1990 (four programmes in total in 2001, 2005 and 2007), was later systematised, as migration was recognised as a long-term permanent phenomenon, initially with the adoption of Law 3386/2005 on the “Entry, stay and integration of Third-country nationals in Greece” and subsequently by Law 4251/2014 “Code for Immigration and Social Integration (OECD, 2018).

The procedure and conditions for the acquisition of Greek citizenship are foreseen by the Greek Citizenship Code (Law 3284/2004, as amended and in force). Namely, Greek citizenship may be acquired by birth (art 1), birth and attendance of school implementing the Greek mandatory curriculum (art 1A), attendance of school implementing the Greek mandatory curriculum (art 1B), recognition (art 2), adoption (art 3), ranking in the armed forces (of non-nationals of Greek origin) (art 4) and naturalisation (art 5).

According to the Citizenship Code, citizenship may be granted to a foreigner who:

a) Has reached the age of majority by the time of the submission of the declaration of naturalisation;

b) Has not been irrevocably convicted of a number of crimes committed intentionally in the last ten years, with a sentence of at least one year or at least six months regardless of the time of the issuance of the conviction decision. Conviction for illegal entry in the country does not obstruct the naturalisation procedure;

c) Has no pending deportation procedure or any other issues with regards to his or her status of residence;

d) Has lawfully resided in Greece for seven continuous years before the submission of the application. A period of three years of lawful residence is sufficient in the case of recognised refugees. This is not the case for subsidiary protection beneficiaries, who should prove a seven year lawful residence as per the general provisions;

e) Hold one of the categories of residence permits foreseen in the Citizenship Code, *inter alia* long-term residence permit, residence permit granted to recognised refugees or subsidiary protection beneficiaries, or second-generation residence permit.

After being granted international protection in Greece (as refugees or beneficiaries of subsidiary protection) beneficiaries are provided with a residence permit that is valid for three years and can be renewed. Additionally, they can apply for travel documents allowing them to visit other countries as a tourist for a maximum of 90 days.

The procedures and conditions for granting residence permits (documents issued by the Greek authorities authorising legal residence in Greece) are foreseen by Law 4541/2014, as amended and currently in force. Applications for granting or renewing residence permits are submitted to the competent Aliens and Migration Department of the Decentralised Administration in the applicant's area of residence or to the Migration Department of the Ministry for Migration Policy, along with supporting documentation and following payment of the fees provided, as per joint ministerial decisions 30825/2014, 68019/2015, 27265/2016 and 31399/2018 in accordance with the requirements of Law 4251/2014.

The law provides for different categories of residence permits, namely, *inter alia*, for employment and professional activity, independent economic activity, studies, voluntary work, research and vocational training, for humanitarian, exceptional and other reasons, to victims of domestic violence, trafficking in human beings or criminal actions, for investors (property owners), for family reunification and to family members of EU citizens or Greek nationals.

Based on the aforementioned, recognised refugees can apply for Greek citizenship after having lived continuously and legally in the country for at least three years, while beneficiaries of subsidiary protection can apply for Greek citizenship after seven years; both must fulfil the relevant conditions of social integration that are stipulated by law. Applicants should also a) have sufficient knowledge of the Greek language, b) be normally integrated in the economic and social life of the country, and c) be able to actively participate in political life (Law 3284/2004, art 5A). A book with information on Greek history, civilisation, geography etc. is issued by the Ministry of Interior for foreigners willing to apply for naturalisation. Upon obtaining the Greek citizenship they receive a Greek ID and enjoy the same rights as Greeks and other European Union citizens, such as being able to live in another EU country or vote in Greek elections.

1.3. Governance of Integration policies: Policy Making and Implementation

Governance actors involved

As Penninx and Garcés-Mascreñas mention “if we want to examine not only how policies are organised but also how they are formulated and implemented, we should shift the focus from government to governance. This means taking into account a wider range of actors, including other administrative levels such as regional and local governments; other institutions, agencies, and practitioners within the state apparatus; and other relevant actors, such as politicians, NGOs, and private institutions” (Penninx and Garcés-Mascreñas, 2016, p.22).

Greece has a highly centralised system with only 7.1% of public expenditure spent at the sub-national level (OECD, 2018). This is the ability of municipalities to play a decisive role in migrant integration. However, the 2010 decentralisation reform, called 'Kallikratis', has shifted competences in the sphere of social policy from provinces to municipalities. The new responsibilities related to day care for children, the protection of the elderly, support for families and vulnerable groups, the implementation of public health programmes and the tackling of social exclusion and marginalisation of the poor, migrants and the uninsured. Still, no specific additional budget was attributed to these competences, limiting the capacity to implement them and resulting in sporadic migrant and refugee integration programmes (OECD, 2018).

Currently, the main government actors involved and in charge of integration policies are 1) the Ministry of Migration and Asylum 2) the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs 3) the Ministry of Interior and 4) the Local Governments through the Municipalities' Council of Migrants' Integration and Community Centres. Other non-governmental entities involved in the integration process are the partners of the ESTIA programme of UNHCR and the HELIOS programme consortium, whose lead partner is the International Organisation of Migration; and implementing partners the Catholic Relief Services, the Danish Refugee Council, the Greek Council for Refugees and Solidarity Now.

Law 4375/2016 art 31 par 1 and 2 titled "Establishment of a Directorate for Social Integration", within the General Directorate for Citizenship and Immigration Policy of the Ministry of Interior and Administrative Reconstruction, establishes a Directorate for Social Integration which shall study, design and implement the policy for the integration of beneficiaries of international protection and migrants in Greece. The Directorate for Social Integration shall consist of the following departments: a. Department for the Planning and Implementation of Social Integration Policies and Programmes b. Department of Information, Sensitization and Social Cohesion c. Department of the Registry for Non-Governmental Organisations and Cooperation with Civil Society Actors. All these departments are ascribed different competences, specifically described in the law, and act in a complementary and coordinated fashion.

Following the July 2019 elections, the previous Ministry for Migration Policy, which was the main government body responsible for issues related to migration integration, was replaced by a new Ministry of Migration and Asylum. At the local level, Article 75 of the 2006 Code of Communes and Municipalities established certain competencies for municipalities regarding the integration of migrants. The active involvement of large cities and towns with a high concentration of migrant populations has since then drastically increased. Municipalities provide temporary accommodation, social assistance, Greek language learning, vocational training and health services. Most of these activities are financed by EU funding instruments.

Governance of integration at local level

The institutions dealing with the integration of immigrants and refugees, especially at local level, have recently expanded in Greece. As already mentioned, article 75 of the 2006 Code of Communes and Municipalities established certain competencies for municipalities regarding the integration of migrants at local level. The active involvement of large cities and towns with a high concentration of migrant populations has since then drastically increased. Local government structures were further re-organised in 2010 with the Kallikratis Programme. As a result, an important part of the everyday implementation of the integration policy has been

transferred to the new Decentralised Administration Authorities. Municipalities provide temporary accommodation, social assistance, Greek language learning, vocational training and health services. EU funding instruments finance most of these activities. Additionally, these decentralised structures issue residence permits through one-stop-shops spread across the territory. One-stop-shops supply information and documents related to applications, provision or renewal of residence permits for third country nationals. To date, their operation is limited.

Law 3852/2010 established the Migrant Integration Councils (MICs) as consultative bodies in the Greek municipalities. Their members are elected municipal councillors as well as representatives of migrant communities and organisations. The MICs are responsible for identifying, investigating and helping local authorities acquire knowledge on problems facing the immigrant population legally residing in their municipality in what pertains to their integration and contact with public or municipal authorities. The Councils can propose actions such as counselling services and public events to effectively implement national integration policies and promote smooth social integration and overall social cohesion. They also assist immigrants in accessing local services and involve them in local structures and policy-making processes (European Commission, 2020).

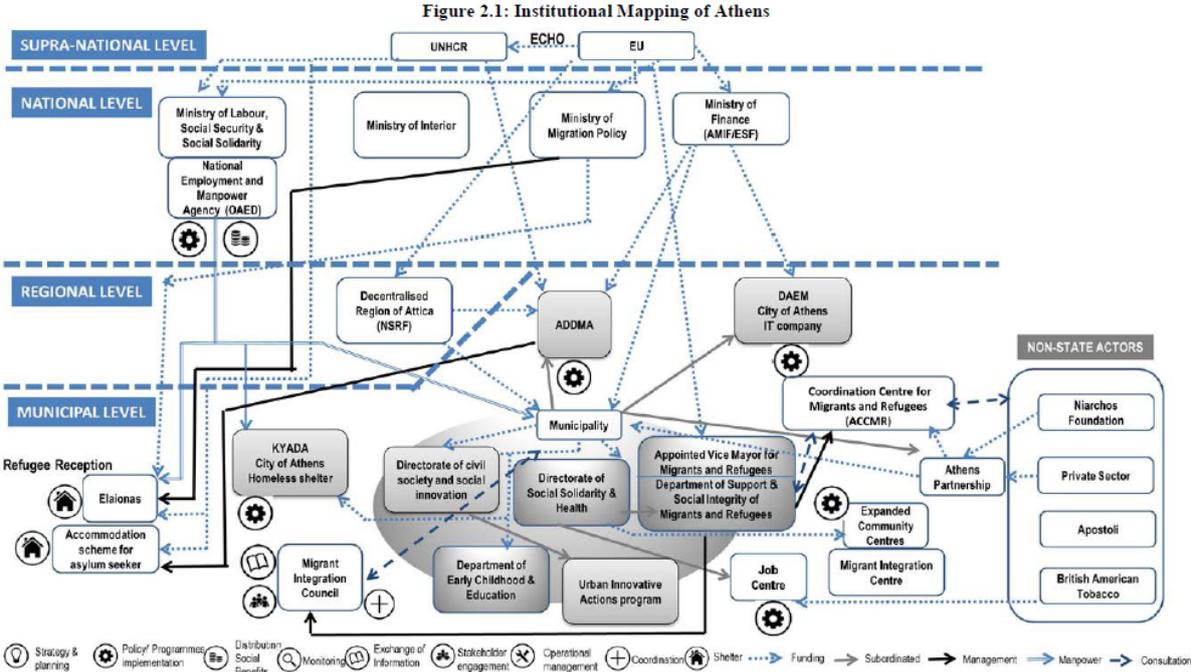
Community Centres are another relatively recent structure under the umbrella of the Directorate of Social Solidarity and Health, supervised by different departments within the directorate. They serve all residents of the municipality (nationals, immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers) and function as hubs for social welfare services, health clinics and employability services (OECD, 2018, p.40). Through these centres, citizens of each municipality are informed about allowances they can apply for, as well as about other relevant social services. Citizens who face serious problems such as long-term unemployment, poverty or homelessness can also refer to these centres.

Furthermore, local offices under municipality jurisdiction, the “Migrants’ Integration Centres” (MICes) were planned by the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Social Solidarity (2015-2019), funded by Partnership Agreement (NSRF) 2014-2020. The MICes are Departments of the Expanded Community Centres (Law 4368/2016, art. 4) and are also responsible for the implementation of actions fostering integration, such as language courses and other training related to employment opportunities. The initiative aims at ensuring a lifelong entry point for migrants and refugees to universal services. The centres provide guidance towards other services according to the needs of the beneficiaries, such as accommodation, job advice and job hunting or financial aid, as well as initial support as required and assistance with social services for newcomers. There are cultural mediators in the centres to support migrants in accessing public services and to steer them towards the relevant local actors. The initiative is set up through EU funding distributed across regional authorities. These services are conceived as entry points for migrants arriving to the cities, as well as points of reference providing advice and emergency intervention throughout their lives. The institution of the MICes, although new, aims to cover the lack of a solid state integration plan (Bagavos et al., 2019).

More recently, specific examples of local institutions have been launched in the large Greek cities and especially Athens. Athens has established the Athens Coordination Centre for Migrant and Refugee issues (ACCMR) that aspires to function as a coordination hub for the fruitful exchange of good practices and know-how between local and international NGOs, international organisations and municipal bodies (Bagavos et al., 2019). The ACCMR is a

partnership involving 75 members (state and non-state actors such as donors, civil society representatives, local and international NGOs and foundations, as well as the city administration) operating in migration and refugee-related activities. Over 200 representatives of its members are actively involved in ACCMR operations. Partner consultations identified needs and gaps in services available to these groups living in Athens (OECD, 2018). The Centre structures its work in five committees that serve a specific sector (housing, employment, health, education, legal support). Each committee convenes once a month to identify gaps in the current service delivery and to design new municipal activities (OECD, 2018, p.48).

Figure 1. Institutional Mapping of Athens, including actors implementing integration activities.
 Source: OECD, 2018. Working Together for Local Integration of Migrants and Refugees in Athens, OECD Publishing, Paris. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264304116-en>



Finally, it should also be mentioned that, for the governance at local level, it is common for NGOs to work with each other and with the local government in specific temporary projects, – many of which are funded by European sources. According to data provided through the European Commission, organisations that are engaged in integration programs and actions are the NGOs Anasa, the Nostos organisation for social integration, the NGO Babel – SYNeirmos, Melissa Network of migrant women, Civis Plus, METAction and Amaka. Furthermore, the immigrants’ and refugees’ organisations Greek Forum of Migrants and Greek Forum of Refugees, as well as the Greek Council for Refugees are also engaged in this type of activities (European Commission, 2020). According to the same source, organisations working in the field of integration are the Hellenic League for Human Rights, Generation 2.0, NGO Antigone, NGO ANCE Hellas, the Medicines du Monde Greece, the Association for the Social Support of Youth, Marangopoulos Foundation for Human Rights and the NGO Arogi AMKE (European Commission, 2020). Different integration initiatives and activities are undertaken by different organisations. For a more thorough analysis see Section 6 (Citizenship).

2. Labour Market

Since 2010, Greece has concluded three economic adjustment programmes with the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund. In addition, it has adopted numerous austerity packages containing a wide range of drastic measures, including reforms in the public sector, pensions, taxes and the labour market. The general socioeconomic situation of the country was affected by the economic crisis; unemployment rose significantly and the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) fell steadily the years following the crisis. The refugee influx of 2015 took place at a time when the Greek state was already dealing with urgent social problems, the deterioration of the welfare state and serious gaps in the overall social protection system. In this context, the prospect of state policy-making for the integration of beneficiaries of international protection and asylum seekers into the labour market was seriously hampered; instead, the state's reaction was embedded in a context of emergency, leaving integration services aside. This, in turn, led to civil society mobilization and civil society actors (NGOs, INGOs, institutionalized as well as atypical organisations) taking up tasks (also related to integration) normally falling under state competence and obligations (Numerato et al., 2019). It has been stressed out that in this context it has been proven impossible to adequately support refugees' and asylum seekers' integration into the Greek labour market (Papadopoulos and Fratsea, 2017).

In this section, the aforementioned aspects are analysed as regards the regulatory level, but also aspects of refugees' and asylum seekers' employment are presented in the level of policies' implementation and actors' and asylum seekers' own experiences.

2.1. Employment at the Regulatory Level

Formal labour market

According to art 71 of Law 4375/2016 and art 15 of Law 4540/2018 (transposition of art 15 of the Reception Conditions Directive), asylum seekers have immediate access to the labour market as employees or service or work providers, as soon as they lodge an asylum application and are provided with an asylum seeker card. Law 4636/2019, adopted in November 2019 and in force since January 2020, introduced a six-month time limit before access to the labour market is granted to applicants. Beneficiaries of international protection (refugees and subsidiary protection beneficiaries) have access to wage employment or self-employment on the same terms and conditions that apply for Greek citizens, provided they hold a valid residence permit (art 69 of Law 4375/2016 and art 27 of Law 4636/2019).

In order to gain access to the labour market, one (including asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection) must obtain a Tax Registration Number (AFM) and a Social Security Number (AMKA) (AIDA, 2019). A Tax Registration Number (AFM) can be issued by the competent Tax Office (as per the person's residence) upon presentation of the asylum seeker card or residence permit and proof of residence (UNHCR, 2020). Numerous administrative obstacles and delays in the issuance of a Tax Registration Number for both categories of persons, mostly related to identification and proof of residence, have been reported (AIDA, 2019).

The situation with regards to the issuance of a Social Security Number (AMKA) is complex and problematic. The legal framework regulating the procedure and necessary documentation for the granting of AMKA (art 153 of Law 3655/2008, Joint Ministerial Decision 7791/245/Φ80321/2009) does not include any provision for the case of asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection. As a result of this gap, the practice of Citizens' Service Centres and AMKA Offices of the Agency for Social Security, the competent authorities for the granting of AMKA, varies depending on each officer's individual interpretation, and there have been numerous reports of administrative and other obstacles leading to denial of granting or significant delays. Ministerial Circular 31547/9662/2018 provided clarifications for the granting of AMKA to asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection. Challenges remained, especially linked to the transcription of their personal data in Greek or demands for translated documentation from their country of origin. Ministerial Circular Φ800320/28107/1857/2019, issued on 20 June 2019, further clarified the issues that emerged in practice and facilitated the procedure for both asylum seekers and refugees. Shortly after the elections of July 2019, on 11 July 2019, the newly elected Minister of Labour and Social Affairs revoked the aforementioned circular (Φ.80320/31355/Δ18.2084/2019). Since then, the authorities do not grant Social Security Numbers (AMKA) and no procedure is in place for non-Greek nationals. As such, asylum seekers and refugees who had not managed to obtain an AMKA before, are not able to access the labour market (Amnesty International, 2019).

Finally, further preconditions may apply for the access of asylum seekers and refugees to the labour market depending on the work position, such as obtaining a National Insurance Number or opening a salary bank account, a common requirement in the private sector (Joint Ministerial Decision 22528/430/2017). Obstacles in the ability of asylum seekers to open a bank account have been reported; major banks in Greece have repeatedly refused to open accounts for asylum seekers, even in cases where a certification of recruitment is submitted by the employer (AIDA, 2019).

These obstacles, along with the overall economic context, high unemployment rates and other hurdles related to competition with Greek-speaking employees hinder the access of asylum seekers and international protection beneficiaries to the formal labour market. This is the reason why third-country nationals remain over-represented in the unemployment statistics (AIDA, 2019). This is also the reason why the few who manage to find a job are usually employed in the informal sector, deprived of basic social rights and subjected to further exploitation (such as trafficking/forced labour), vulnerability and precarious income-generating activities (European Commission, 2017).

Validation of skills and recognition of qualifications and prior experience

Beneficiaries of international protection are treated in the same way as Greek nationals in relation to the recognition of foreign diplomas, certificates and proof of formal qualifications; if they cannot provide evidence, the relevant Greek authorities should facilitate the process (art 29 of Presidential Decree 141/2013, Law 4636/2019 art 29). Notably, no relevant procedure has been regulated for refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection. Law 4540/2018 and Law 4636/2019 (art 54) provide that the conditions for the assessment of the skills of asylum seekers who do not have the necessary documentation will be set by a Joint Ministerial Decision (art 16). Such a decision has not been issued and therefore no official regulated procedure is in place for the validation of skills either.

At present, skill validation remains a task that must be carried out by public actors. Generally speaking, the competent public institutions for the facilitation of the recognition of foreign diplomas are the Department of Studies, Programmes and Scholar Issues of the Ministry of Education (for the recognition of titles of primary and secondary education), the Interdisciplinary Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance (EOPPEP) and the Hellenic National Academic Recognition Information Centre (DOATAP).

EOPPEP is the National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance, an all-encompassing statutory body investing on better quality and more efficient & reliable lifelong learning services in Greece. EOPPEP operates under the supervision of the Minister of Education, Research and Religious Affairs and is seated in Athens; it is responsible for recognizing the qualifications of all citizens, including third-country nationals. It has derived from the amalgamation of three national bodies, all under the supervision of the same Ministry: the National Centre for the Accreditation of Lifelong Learning Providers (EKEPIS), the National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications (EOPP) & the National Centre for Vocational Guidance (EKEP).

However, the relevant general procedures do not take into consideration the special circumstances of asylum seekers and international protection beneficiaries – such as the impossibility of obtaining/accessing/translating relevant documentation and – and no specific procedure has been regulated for them; as a result, the validation of their skills and the recognition of their qualifications is greatly hindered. The Council of Europe in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs are currently implementing the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees (EQPR), a capacity-building project. Launched in 2017 as a pilot initiative and currently implemented for the 2018-2020 period, it aspires to assess the education level, work experience and language proficiency of refugees, in absence of full documentation (Council of Europe, 2017). Asylum seekers or recognised refugees residing in Greece who have been accepted by an establishment of higher education and have concluded at least one year of university studies can apply for it. The EQPR is issued following an evaluation procedure; it includes the refugee's qualifications and is valid for five years (Council of Europe, 2017). It should be noted that the EQPR is not recognised as an official document and cannot be considered a substitute thereof; Greek public universities do not accept it as such and, therefore, it does not grant access to higher education (MINEDU, 2018).

Vocational training

No public integration policy or strategic plan is in place to facilitate the access of refugees and asylum seekers or specific vulnerable groups (such as female refugees with disabilities and so forth) to the labour market.

A significant initiative in this field is the HELIOS Project implemented by IOM (IOM, 2019). The project aims at promoting the integration of beneficiaries of international protection residing in temporary accommodation schemes (Open Accommodation Centres, Reception and Identification Centres, hotels of the IOM FILOXENIA or ESTIA programme), through, inter alia, the provision of individual employability and job readiness support, including job counselling, access to job-related certifications and networking with private employers. Refugees or beneficiaries of subsidiary protection recognised after 1 January 2018 are offered five individual job counselling sessions with job counsellors who help them develop a career plan by assessing their interests and abilities and by guiding them through resources on career

information and job search. Additionally, they are informed about educational possibilities and may access official certifications (e.g. professional driving licenses, ECDL certifications and foreign language certifications) in order to increase their employment potential depending on their eligibility (IOM, 2019).

NGOs are the main and very often the only providers of employability services and vocational training. It has been stressed that NGOs are primarily oriented towards private-sector companies, where refugees and asylum seekers are mostly employed as unskilled workers. Their interventions and activities are based on established patterns of employment services, including the preparation of a CV, preparation for job interviews, information on employment services of the Greek state and private agencies which promote employment, creation of a register of businesses wishing to employ refugees and asylum seekers (“active matching”) and the organisation of events promoting employment with the participation of employers and the unemployed (Numerato et al., 2019). On the other hand, solidarity initiatives engaged in employability projects and activities focus on social solidarity, developing employment opportunities in the field of the social and solidarity economy, mostly in social cooperatives.

In this framework, it appears that Greece is faced with an absent or at least fragmented policy as regards refugees’ employment. Most employability and vocational training initiatives are project-based, depend on funding, lack sustainability and do not form part of a general planning and strategy. Taking into consideration the overall economic situation, the unemployment rate and the fact that available funding is mostly focused on humanitarian response rather than integration, it becomes apparent that the access of refugees and asylum seekers to the labour market is seriously hindered.

Employment in the informal labour market

Employment has consistently been identified as a factor that influences refugees’ integration. While jobs boost self-reliance, they also enable refugees to meet members of the host society, providing an opportunity to develop language skills and contribute to restoring self-esteem. For refugees, the right to work, buttressed by labour rights at work, are vital prerequisites for reducing vulnerability and securing dignity. Harnessing the skills and entrepreneurship of refugees can benefit local economic activity and national development. However, there are many obstacles to including refugees in the labour force of their host countries — political economy concerns, labour market structure and capacity, and the capacities of the refugees (Ager and Strang, 2008). In Greece particularly, which suffered during the last ten years from high rates of long-term unemployment, the phenomenon of informal labour market of migrant workers scaled up (Numerato et al., 2019). According to available data on agrarian labour from EU authorities, 50% of employees in agricultural work in Greece are migrants (Migration Dialogue, 2018).

A recent study on the precarious status of migrant labour in Greece (Kasimis et al., 2015) generally showed that migrant labour has largely contributed to the avoidance of an ‘impending’ crisis in Greek agriculture by helping to reduce the labour costs of production and by meeting the increased labour needs. However, migrants and asylum seekers are undeclared, hired to do hard, arduous and unhealthy jobs, and are often low and/or irregularly paid. Clearly, migrants have greatly serviced agriculture and other sectors such as construction and tourism, to which the domestic population has shown little interest; however, they have

been exposed to serious harm due to informal arrangements and insecure conditions of employment (Kasimis et al., 2015).

Attempts by host states to regularise the informal employment of refugees

In a recent survey (2018) on Greek business, the ILO made an indirect recommendation to Greece for the regularisation of undeclared/informal employment, stating that the country should adopt specific policy measures for the Labour Inspectorate. Specifically, Greece should adjust its labour policy to include social groups with a high level of mobility such as migrants, who could respond efficiently to new tools and policies.

According to art 28 par. 3 of Law 4152/2014 (which incorporated Law 4052/2012) “Obligations of employers and of employees of third-country nationals – Sanctions” employers should a) require third-country nationals to hold and submit a valid residence permit or other valid residence permit b) keep a copy of the residence permit or other residence permit at the disposal of the competent authorities at least during the period of their employment in case of a possible inspection, c) inform the competent authorities on a case-by-case basis of the recruitment of a third-country citizen. In case of non-compliance with the obligations in the aforementioned cases (b) and (c), financial sanctions are imposed according to art 92, par 1 and par 2 of Law 4052/2012 (Kapsalis, 2015).

2.2 Access to the labour market

Labour market barriers

The unemployment rate increased dramatically since 2008, reaching 24.9% (24.5% Greeks, 32.2% foreigners originating outside the EU) in 2015; it has slightly decreased to 19.3% (18.8% Greeks, 27.4% foreigners originating outside the EU) in 2018. The long-term unemployment rate as a percentage of total unemployment rose from 49.9% (51.3% Greeks, 38.8% foreigners originating outside the EU) in 2011 to 73.1% (73.8% Greeks, 66.4% foreigners originating outside the EU) in 2017 (Eurostat, 2020). A percentage of 59.6% of the population aged 20-64 (48.7% female, 70.8% male – 59.3% Greeks, 62.5% foreigners originating outside the EU) was employed in 2011; the percentage decreased up to 52.9% (43.3% female, 62.7% male – 53.1% Greeks, 49.4% foreigners originating outside the EU) in 2013; since then it has been slightly increasing, reaching 59.5% (49.1% female, 67.7% male – 59.7% Greeks, 56.5% foreigners originating outside the EU) in 2018 (Eurostat, 2020).

As noticed, available statistics only distinguish between Greek citizens and foreigners originating from EU Member States or from outside the EU. Therefore, no statistical data referring specifically to beneficiaries of international protection and asylum seekers are available. Research conducted among young Syrian refugees showed that only 7.25% were full time employed in Greece in 2017, of whom more than half worked without social insurance (Council of Europe, 2018). In any case, the discussed data reveal that foreigners are more severely affected by unemployment compared to Greek citizens. The share of non-EU citizen participation in Greece’s labour force has also decreased since before the crisis. Finally, it should be noted that documenting the employment and unemployment rates of refugees and asylum seekers is a challenging task, due to the fact that they are mostly employed in the informal sector. Their registration in the social security and tax system is seriously hampered,

as mentioned below in detail, resulting in turn in their condition as largely undocumented. It has been reported that the sectors in which foreigners were working before the crisis – construction, public works, transport (men), cleaning and domestic/caring services (women) and retail – have been negatively affected, with consequent negative effects on their employability (OECD, 2018). Currently, it is considered that their prospects are related to jobs in cleaning, agriculture or unskilled jobs in the tourism sector (Numerato et al., 2019).

Furthermore, research highlights that foreigner women have limited opportunities to benefit from policies and specific gender-targeted programmes aimed at labour market integration, vocational training and education, given that policies and programmes are fragmented and ad hoc (Anagnostou and Gemi, 2015). There are significant differences between the two genders in employment and in the sectors in which male and female refugees and asylum seekers are employed. Men are mostly employed in the primary sector and in construction, while women work in household and care services (Numerato et al., 2019). Women are mostly employed in the informal sector – approximately half of them in care services, cleaning services and domestic work – which leaves them at a precarious situation (Bontenbal and Lillie, 2019). It should also be stressed that they are treated by the institutional framework as dependent family members rather than as autonomous and active actors which, combined with the lack of education and cultural biases, further hinders their access to the labour market (Anagnostou and Gemi, 2015).

Actors and local initiatives involved

In terms of the access of asylum seekers and refugees to the labour market, it must be highlighted that state authorities are not involved in the provision of integration services, which are mainly serviced by civil society organisations and NGOs, depending on the available funding by European and international actors. It has been stressed that the weak involvement of public employment services leads to a disconnection between the provision of services and the access of asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection to the labour market. In reality, refugees and asylum seekers mostly find jobs through a wider social network (Numerato et al., 2019).

In terms of vocational training focused on the acquisition of work skills, civil society organisations and NGOs are once again the main, and often the only, providers of employability services and vocational training. Various stakeholders – civil society organisations, NGOs, refugee communities and other actors – implement relevant projects targeting refugees and asylum seekers. The focus is mainly on language courses (as knowledge of the Greek language is considered a crucial factor to ensure access to the labour market), job searching techniques and writing strong CVs, rather than actually finding jobs for the people concerned. In addition, NGOs have been providing skills for the development of trainings, including computer skill programmes, whereas public bodies have done little in this field. However, it should be noted that, as of February 2019, migrants and refugees can also attend free computer classes at the Migrant Integration Centre in Athens.

Moreover, unemployed refugees and asylum seekers in search of employment have the right to be registered in the Registry of OAED, the Manpower Employment Organisation of the Ministry of Labour. If they register, they may benefit from OAED services, such as being referred to a job if there is a vacant position corresponding to their qualifications and interests or obtaining an unemployment bulletin. They may also access services and advice including

CV registration, preparation of an individual action plan, opportunities to participate in employment or vocational training programmes.

The responsible authority for the regularisation of the informal employment of refugees in Greece is the agency of the Hellenic Labour Inspectorate, a monitoring mechanism of the Ministry of Labour, which monitors the implementation of labour law and whose primary objective is to safeguard the labour rights, safety and security of employees, as well as their health security. In addition, the aforementioned agency is responsible for investigating – at the same time and independently of insurance organisations – the insurance coverage of employees, including refugees and asylum seekers, in order to address the problem of undeclared work in Greece. More specifically, the Hellenic Labour Inspectorate focuses on the following: a) improving labour relations and occupational safety and health by means of performing checks on the application of labour law provisions, b) creating a spirit of reconciliation between employers and employees, c) providing employees with information on the most effective means of complying with these provisions, d) carrying out checks on the insurance coverage and legality employee employment and e) the imposition of the corresponding penalties. The Hellenic Labour Inspectorate was established by Law 2639/1998, A205 “Regulation of labour relations, constitution of the Labour Inspection Team and other provisions” and its later amendments (Law 3996/2011 A170 and Presidential Decree no. 113/2014 A180) and it reports directly to the Minister of Labour, Social Security and Social Solidarity.

Greece has implemented several national pilot programmes for vocational training, skills certification and the promotion of employment for unemployed asylum seekers and refugees under the funding of AMIF-ISF. The action is aimed at the implementation of a pilot vocational training, skills certification and employment promotion programme for 3,000 unemployed refugees and asylum seekers residing in the Attica and Central Macedonia regions. The action focused on occupational specialties with an increasing trend in the labour market, including a range of activities such as supportive services, professional communication skills, continuing vocational training (pre-training and training sessions), skills certification, pilot employment and job placements. Attica and Central Macedonia are the two regions with the largest concentration of registered refugees and a high demand for vacancies within several sectors of employment. The overall objective of the program has been to enhance refugees and asylum seekers in acquiring technical skills that they can use when integrating into the labour market.

Additionally, the Municipality of Athens recently established the Athens Coordination Centre for Migrant and Refugee Issues (ACCMR). The goal of the ACCMR, which has been operating since 2017, is to foster the efficient coordination of municipal authorities and stakeholders operating in the city, such as national and international NGOs, international organisations and migrant and refugee community groups, in order to create the necessary conditions for the smooth integration of migrants and refugees currently living in the city of Athens. It has developed a strategic action plan for the smooth integration of migrants and refugees in the city and an online platform which enables users to map services and activities in the broader Athens area relating to asylum seekers, refugees and migrants.

Furthermore, the Hellenic American University (HAU) has established a Certificate of Attainment in Greek for candidates from Vocational Training Centres. It is awarded to candidates from Vocational Training Centres who successfully participate in examinations

administered especially for them. These examinations are organised within the framework of the programme entitled.

Despite Greece's aforementioned efforts to provide employability support to refugees and asylum seekers, there is much work to be done, as the rates of labour absorption are still very low. Part of our interviews with representatives of Humanitarian Organisations dealing with related issues, focus on the need to enhance employability. As a representative of Lesvos Solidarity NGO mentioned, there is an urgent need for a long-term plan for refugees' and asylum seekers integration in the labour market:

There is a possibility for them to be employed in certain jobs. Especially when they have some knowledge of the language or they know the job very well. Jobs where they will have insurance and all they are entitled to. So, jobs must be created for these people. This way, they will not be a threat to the employment of Greeks, and they will not clash with the local communities over very low wages, etc. This must be organised somehow, at a different level, they must enter the labour market within a protective framework, or new jobs must be created, subsidised ones, which will create normality for them. Create a European programme and jobs in which you do not have to check if rules are being respected, so that one can search for jobs and claim one's rights. A very specific roadmap is needed, with all-embracing planning. Looking into what the needs of the Greek economy are, for example, and where their skills lie. I believe the integration process is not a simple task and interaction with society is crucial.

According to our interviewees, the high rates of unemployment among refugees and asylum seekers are related to the existing economic crisis in the country. Specifically, the coordinator of a local NGO in Lesvos implementing mainly programmes for the protected accommodation of unaccompanied minors and vulnerable persons on the island mentioned that:

The most important issue is that they are not incorporated into the labour market. This begins from the fact that there are no jobs anyway. There is a crisis, and it is hard for many Greeks to find employment. Greeks too emigrate abroad. And, in the end, most refugees find employment as interpreters.

During our fieldwork we also observed that several asylum seekers or refugees (including part of the interviewees) are employed in NGOs as interpreters or cultural mediators. However, another interlocutor, employee of an NGO, pointed out that NGOs very often do not actually employ asylum seekers but rather involve them as volunteers despite their urgent need for employment. A doctor interviewee, working in the public hospital of Mytilene and former INGO employee, followed the same line of argumentation:

We almost, like, we try to employ, we have only two or three and you are legally allowed to employ asylum seekers even without the asylum. Every one of our translators here works eight hours, so full time. He is still allowed to work until he's deported. I think, unfortunately, there are not many projects that employ refugees. Many projects that have volunteers from abroad or refugees still volunteers, which of course is the main thing. People want to have a job that would give them perspective and stability.

Overall, despite the examples of refugees and asylum seekers employed in the humanitarian sector as interpreters or cultural mediators, their general access to the labour market remains limited and highly problematic. Both the overall socio-economic situation of the country due to the crisis and the lack of relevant policies constitute the main factors contributing to the reproduction of insecurity, precariousness and unemployment among refugees and asylum seekers.

2.3 Refugees' and Asylum Seekers' Experiences

Despite the fact that, according to the relevant legislation, asylum seekers can access the labour market, in practice they face a wide range of obstacles, either due to the socio-economic situation of the country or due to the abovementioned institutional and bureaucratic factors as well as xenophobic perceptions. Unemployment, both among asylum seekers and refugees, in Greece is one of the most significant barriers that the interviewees mentioned to us. As Robel, a young asylum seeker from Eritrea living in Moria Hotspot, mentions,

I was looking for jobs but there are no jobs. I tried to find any job, I don't care if it is a good or a bad job, I can't choose at this time, so if I get any job I'm ready to do it, but I was looking for job and I feel tired, you know, I give up. I asked any organisations, I have A.M.K.A, I.K.A, everything. I have everything of the document, but I couldn't find.

Importantly, incidents of serious hardship while searching for a job in Greece are often reported. According to their experiences and narratives, interviewees frequently come up against negative attitudes and prejudice by potential Greek employers, as Robel narrates:

The locals shout at you, they say there is no job, get out of here. [...] Sometimes when you ask someone that is giving a job, I mean locals, they tell you that they are difficult for them to find a job. When you hear that you give up, but I think when you are a local you don't apply for a job, this is not good for me, I don't want to do it, but when you are a refugee you just want to focus on the money, not what job it is. But I think they didn't understand that, but when I have been informed that it is difficult for them also, I give up. And I just want to tell you something, I'm not asking for the favour, but if you can just find me any job, I'm ready to do it, any job, in a restaurant, in the hotel, anything if you can because I don't know how to apply for translation, any job, I'm telling you how difficult it is.

When asylum seekers do manage to find a job, this is usually in the most difficult sectors of the economy and in precarious conditions. For example, a significant number of asylum seekers in Greece are employed in agriculture or in the industry and in factories, usually in low-paid positions and working long hours.

It should also be mentioned that a significant number of asylum seekers who speak English in addition to their mother tongue have managed to find jobs as interpreters in NGOs or INGOs. Seralam, a young asylum seeker from Afghanistan, narrated his story. He used to work in agriculture in different areas of Greece, from the island of Crete to Argos in the mainland, when he learned about job positions for interpreters in an NGO, where he was hired:

Yeah. I just found my work, that we can do first of all, and it's a kind of big organisation, really good organisation and they pay us and we help the

people, a person should think about this. What I want I should want for the second brother, for other person. So, I really feel happy that I'm helping the people and if I can solve their problems by just only speaking by language... Yes, pleasure and, also, they pay us. So, they are satisfied.

Even though significant numbers of asylum seekers and refugees seem to be absorbed by the rising economy of the humanitarian sector, this fact cannot of course reverse the wide range of remaining challenges regarding their employment opportunities. It must also be mentioned that employment in the humanitarian sector requires specific qualifications, such as speaking English or Greek that a majority of asylum seekers do not have. For them, employment opportunities remain scarce, even if they have other qualifications and expertise and are capable of contributing to other economic sectors.

3. Education

According to the Hellenic Statistical Authority on the basis of data provided by the Ministry of Education, during the academic year 2017-2018, a total of 8,017 asylum seekers and refugees were enrolled in primary and secondary schools, of which 3,692 were enrolled in primary schools, 900 in lower secondary schools and 699 in upper secondary schools with reception classes, according to the Ministry of Education (ELSTAT, 2019). As of June 2019, 12,867 asylum seekers and refugees were enrolled in primary and secondary schools in Greece: 1,506 in pre-primary schools, 2,267 in Reception/Preparatory Structures for the Education of Refugees (DYEP) in primary schools and 804 in Reception Structures for the Education of Refugees (DYEP) in lower secondary schools; 1,774 in primary schools, 807 in lower secondary schools and 1,469 in upper secondary schools with reception classes; and 3,246 in primary schools, 687 in lower secondary schools and 289 in upper secondary schools without Reception Classes (MINEDU, 2020). According to UNICEF, in January 2019 an estimated 11,500 refugee and migrant children of school age (4-17 years old) were enrolled in formal education, out of the estimated total of 28,000 refugee and migrant children in the whole of Greece; a higher percentage of children of the same age group were enrolled in Greek schools in urban settings: 66% in December 2018 (UNICEF, 2019).

3.1. Formal Education

The Greek Constitution (art 16) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (art 28) guarantee the right to education. Under Greek law (mainly Law 1566/1985, Law 2910/2001), education is compulsory for all children in Greece aged between five and fifteen years old. Compulsory education includes pre-primary (one year), primary (six years) and lower secondary education (three years). Upper secondary education (three years) is optional and includes general upper secondary school and technical vocational school. All children in Greece, including refugees and asylum seekers, have the right to enrol in public schools.

With regards to early childhood education in Greece, children aged six months to five years old can attend infant centres, and children aged between 2 and 5 years old can request a place in a child centre, which are either run by the municipalities or privately funded. From the age of four, refugee and asylum-seeking children can attend pre-primary school, which is compulsory after the age of five (UNHCR, 2020).

Education of Refugee Children and Asylum Seekers

According to art 28 of newly established Law 4636/2019, children beneficiaries of international protection have the same obligation to enrol in compulsory public primary and secondary education units as nationals; if they do not comply, sanctions may be imposed upon their parents. According to art 51, the same applies for children asylum seekers; the authorities are obliged to provide necessary and adequate means to facilitate the procedure. If their enrolment is not completed within three months after their registration, they may be deprived of reception conditions and administrative sanctions may be imposed on their parents. According to article 52, access to secondary education is not only limited to children but also guaranteed to adult asylum seekers.

Currently, the preparatory classes (*Δομές Υποδοχής και Εκπαίδευσης Προσφύγων*, DYEP) are integrated within the school units of the primary and secondary educational system and offer specific short preparatory study courses for children aged 4 to 15 years old. Law 4415/2016 regulates the issues of education in the Greek language and intercultural education. In 2016, DYEP that took into consideration the characteristics of the refugee population (mobility, time of arrival and duration of stay) and the size of the student population were formed for the first time (Common Ministerial Decision 152360/ΓΔ4/2016). Law 4547/2018 (Chapter 7) further regulated the issue of the Structures. The preparatory classes for the education of refugees (DYEP) were also established for the current academic year through a Common Ministerial Decision issued in October 2019 (Decision 147357/Δ1/2019).

In this context, education may be provided to refugees either through the school units of primary and secondary education of the mainstream educational system – namely, to children living in dispersed urban settings and enrolling in morning classes of public schools near their place of residence, alongside Greek children – or through the Reception Structures (DYEP) operating in the framework of the mainstream educational system, as afternoon preparatory classes taking place in public schools, neighbouring camps or hot spots, for children aged 4-15 years old (AIDA, 2020). The classes take place after the morning classes for Greek children have been completed. This educational programme aims to facilitate the integration of refugee and migrant children into the educational process in a way that will gradually allow them to join mainstream classes in Greek schools. The first year of the programme's implementation consisted of weekly educational sessions of twenty hours covering four main subjects: Greek, Mathematics, English and Information Technology. Arts and sporting activities were also included (Karzi and Tselepi, 2018).

Lessons conducted in the context of the DYEP programme do not take place during the regular morning programme of the public schools but during the afternoon, when the morning classes (for Greek students) are over. Therefore, a number of NGOs and organisations of education professionals have criticised the DYEP programme for not being inclusive, for promoting social segregation and for resulting in “ghetto schools”. As highlighted by the Greek Helsinki Monitor, “on 4 December 2017, the Panhellenic Scientific Union of Primary School Directors protested the continuing use of their school annexes, urging instead that the refugee children are integrated in the regular morning programme through the use of the successful structure of Reception Classes” (GHM, 2018).

In addition, based on Law 3879/2010 (art 26), Reception Classes were created in areas characterised as Zones of Educational Priority (ZEP), as part of the formal educational system. The Zones of Educational Priority (ZEP) aim to enhance active participation and effective learning among primary and secondary education students who do not hold the required level of attainment in Greek, including refugee students, in order to integrate them into the Greek educational system. Such classes have been in operation in certain public primary and secondary schools since 2010. The classes are integrated in the mainstream educational system, which the students attend in parallel alongside Greek students. The schools where Reception Classes are currently operating are stipulated by Ministerial Decisions Φ1/108909/Δ1/2019 and Φ1/170112/Δ1/2019.

Intercultural schools

Intercultural schools were established in Greece in 1996 by Law 2413/1996. This school model was considered the first significant step towards an education which would not aim at the assimilation but at the integration of children from diverse cultural backgrounds (Karzi and Tselepi, 2018).

Intercultural schools operate at the pre-primary, primary and secondary levels and aim at the educational and social integration of refugee students into Greek schools while respecting their cultural identity and avoiding negative discrimination. They use the same curricula as public schools, adjusted accordingly in order to meet the special needs of their students (Law 2413/1996). According to the law, schools having over 45% of foreign, repatriate and/or refugee students may be converted into intercultural schools of pre-primary, primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education. There are currently 13 intercultural schools of primary education and 13 of secondary education in Greece (KLIMAKA, 2020). This is a small number taking into consideration the actual needs and number of refugees in the country.

Teachers are recruited on the basis of their experience in intercultural education, their knowledge of the mother tongue languages of the students and their capacity to teach Greek as a foreign language (UNHCR, 2020). Their curriculum of intercultural schools is the same as that in the mainstream state schools. There are, however, some modifications which aim at the adaptation of the curriculum to the multi-ethnic character of the student population, as well as at the satisfaction of its learning and social needs (Markou, 2011). Special programmes are applied, emphasising on intercultural communication and on the educational and cultural particularities of the students, who may also attend Reception Classes offering Greek language lessons (CERD, 2017).

According to Law 4415/2016, intercultural schools will be gradually converted into Experimental Intercultural Education Schools with the same curricula and teaching methods used in Experimental Schools. The law establishes the goal of these schools as that of cooperating with Greek institutions of higher education by implementing, on an experimental basis, research and innovation programmes on intercultural education. They also aim to address educational and social exclusion on the grounds of ethno-cultural origin, with a view to further broaden the application of their programmes to other schools.

Teaching staff

School advisors are responsible for providing scientific and pedagogical guidance, support and training, including on assessment, to all teachers of refugee and asylum-seeking students, both in preparatory and mainstream classes (EACEA, 2019). To support the education of refugees, the Institute of Educational Policy has created an open access platform with material developed in the framework of Intercultural Education programmes and a website on Refugee Education in support of those involved in actions of refugee children education. Additionally, staff instruction actions on issues of intercultural education, Reception Class functioning and the production of educational material (“Interventions on instruction for reinforcing school structures of the educational system”) have been put to effect.

Despite the aforementioned provisions and initiatives, a series of challenges have been identified with regards to the teaching staff. The absence of specific skill requirements in teacher recruitment, insufficient number of teachers with relevant experience and appropriate skills, recruitment of teachers with reduced working hours, constant rotation, inadequate

training and support with regards to bilingual and intercultural education, and specifically the teaching of Greek as a foreign language, the needs and characteristics of the target population and the adoption of appropriate teaching methods and conflict resolution techniques, are currently the main challenges that have been identified (Tzoraki, 2019). In consequence, the fulfilment of the educational objectives is compromised.

Higher Education

There are no specific provisions facilitating the access of refugees to higher education in Greece. They may access universities under the same conditions as Greek nationals, upon participation in entry examinations organised by the Greek state. Law 4415/2016 describes the necessary documentation that must be submitted by third-country nationals who have attended education in their country of origin and wish to participate in the procedure. However language requirements and bureaucratic procedures are key barriers to refugees' access to higher education. Indeed, it is reported that the number of non-Greek students in Greek universities is small in comparison to the overall number of domestic students and that adults with an immigrant background (including refugees and asylum seekers) are less likely to enter higher education institutions in Greece (OECD, 2018).

Adult education

Formal adult education in Greece is only provided in the context of higher education. According to article 28 of P.D 141/2013 (and art. 28 of the new Law 4636/2019), beneficiaries of international protection hold the right to participate in educational programmes for adults, related to employment and vocational training, under the same terms and conditions applicable to Greek nationals. The same right is guaranteed for asylum seekers (art 54 of Law 4636/2019). No formal learning programmes are available in the country for adult refugees or asylum seekers, who may enrol in informal education programmes, described below in detail.

Adult refugees and asylum seekers who have not completed mandatory education may enrol in Second Chance Schools, which were established by Law 2525/1997. Courses are conducted in the afternoon and include Greek Language, Mathematics, English Language, Information Technology, Social Education, Environmental Education and Physical Sciences. Upon completion of a two-year study programme, students may obtain a certificate equivalent to that obtained upon completion of a lower secondary school (UNHCR, 2020). There are currently 56 Second Chance Schools in Greece.

Language learning

As mentioned above, Reception Classes for students with little or no knowledge of Greek have been established in primary and secondary schools as of 2010 in areas characterised as Educational Priority Zones (ZEP), based on Law 3879/2010.

Reception Classes include a two-cycle programme within the mainstream class schedule. The first cycle is intended for students with a minimum or zero level of competence in the Greek language. These students are entitled to intensive Greek language courses and may also join a few mainstream classes on the following subjects: Physical Education, Art, Music, Foreign Language or an extra subject determined by a joint decision of the board of schoolteachers and the school advisor. The second cycle is intended for students with an

average level of competence in the Greek language, which may cause them difficulties in mainstream class attendance. Language learning support, as well as support in other subjects, takes place either in the form of parallel complementary tuition or inside mainstream classes. The programme's scope is that the pupils attend most of the teaching hours in a mainstream class so that they can be integrated as soon as possible (European Commission, 2020).

In addition, Greek language courses are also taught in the Reception Classes of Intercultural Schools and in the Reception/Preparatory Structures for the Education of Refugees (DYEP), as described above in detail. On the contrary, there is no provision in place regarding the opportunity of refugee pupils to learn their native language.

3.2. Informal Education

Informal education activities are provided by civil society actors in urban settings, as well as inside or near refugee reception facilities. The Institute of Educational Policy has developed a platform for the submission of proposals for the provision of informal educational activities in reception facilities by organisations; the pedagogical relevance of the proposals is assessed by the Institute and passed on to the Ministry of Education for approval (Lipnickiene et al., 2018).

Despite the positive steps taken to enhance the integration of refugees and asylum seekers through education, a series of issues remain crucial. Due to the persistent difficulties in the field of formal education for refugees in Greece, several NGOs provide informal educational support to asylum seekers and refugees. However, according to our interlocutors, the educational operations of NGOs are often characterised by capacity shortages. As the coordinator of a local NGO in Lesbos mentions:

There is an informal education provided by some organisations, but it is not always very organised. There might, for example, be one teacher for a huge number of children and this makes it impossible to have a proper class. In practice it simply keeps them occupied or they might acquire some immediate knowledge in English or Greek, or some other kind of knowledge.

Other important issues mentioned by the interviewees include the limited specialisation of the teachers as well as the lack of intercultural services, at least regarding the informal educational activities. For example, the Coordinator of a support centre for refugees and locals in Mytilene mentioned that the large number of recreational activities cannot fill the gap of educational programmes for refugees and asylum seekers:

I think many (programmes) may be not educational but rather recreational activities. Painting something, theatre, this and that. Some of them are good. Some of them are not good. Some of them don't have a programme just like, okay, let's talk some English. We just entertain people. There's some skill. So many of the activities are like entertaining. Just beginner's language learning, it is done a lot but with volunteers mainly and very few with professional staff, very few.

Additionally, as demonstrated by a mapping of informal education activities across Greece conducted in November 2018, civil society engagement is significantly higher in urban settings compared to rural areas and facilities in the rest of Greece (UNHCR, 2018). A wide range of actors (NGOs, refugee groups, cultural centres, municipal bodies, private foundations etc.) are

currently engaged in such activities in Athens (ACCMR, 2020). For example, the Athens Open Schools is a municipal project aiming to convert school buildings, after dismissal on holidays and on weekends, into community centres offering a variety of free, targeted activities and workshops for all ages, including language courses, Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) Education and so forth. It was first implemented in 2015 and is currently taking place in 14 schools. Another example is the Learning for Education Project, which offers informal education and homework support to refugees and migrants children as well as their parents, providing coverage of the educational needs of children aged 3-17 and daily homework support to children aged 6-15 years (ELIX, 2020). Given the fact that the relevant activities are either project-based or delivered on a voluntary basis, their sustainability and provision on a systematic and organised basis are questionable.

Adult Education

In Greece, the informal education mostly refers to adult education and falls under the competence of the General Secretariat for Lifelong Learning of the Ministry of Education. Adult refugees and asylum seekers have the possibility to attend a series of vocational training programmes, provided to Greeks and foreigners alike. Vocational Training Centres (KEK) design, organise and provide courses in continuing vocational training for employees, the unemployed and school leavers from all levels of education in many different subjects and implement relevant projects. Centres for Lifelong Learning (KDVM) and public or private Vocational Training Institutes (IEK) also operate across Greece, providing adult education (European Commission, 2020). Finally, civil society actors, including non-governmental organisations, refugee communities and other actors provide relevant courses as well.

A significant initiative in the field of adult refugee education is the HELIOS Project, implemented by the IOM (IOM, 209). The project aims at promoting the integration of beneficiaries of international protection currently residing in temporary accommodation schemes in Greece through, inter alia, integration courses within Integration Learning Centres operating across mainland Greece and the island of Crete. Each course cycle consists of 360 teaching hours for a period of six months with modules on Greek language learning, cultural orientation (Greek culture, history, tradition and contemporary customs), job readiness (information on job searching through different sources, practical matters on preparing for a job application and relevant soft skills) and life skills (IOM, 2019). Only refugees or beneficiaries of subsidiary protection recognised after 1 January 2018 can benefit from the HELIOS Project (IOM, 2019).

Given the fact that adult education is largely fragmented, project-restricted and not integrated into a general state policy, the aforementioned programmes and projects lack sustainability, and their effectiveness is largely hindered. It should also be noted that the integration of adults into technical and vocational education schemes is rather complicated, due to the lack of an adequate system of certification of the qualifications obtained in their country of origin (CERD, 2017).

Additionally, the semi-structured interviews implemented during the research, highlighted the frequent lack of coordination, overlapping of responsibilities and competition among the different educational actors.

Language Learning

Language courses for refugees and asylum seekers, both children and adults, are provided by a wide range of civil society actors, described above with regards to informal school education and adult education. Indicatively, Greek language courses are provided by non-governmental organisations, refugee groups and other actors in urban settings and within or near refugee facilities, as well as by Centres for Vocational Training (KEK) (UNHCR, 2020). In addition, online language courses are delivered by Universities in Greece, funded within the framework of the Erasmus + Programme, under the competence of the Directorate for Scholarships National Agency of Greece. In this framework, 2,000 licenses of online language learning were delivered to the University of the Aegean to be granted to refugees aged 12 or more in the Aegean islands. These language licenses allow refugees to attend online courses for learning a foreign language from the 12 available languages and are part of the Online Linguistic Support (OLS) programme of the European Commission. For the reasons mentioned above and given the temporary, project-driven, voluntary and non-systematic nature of the services provided, the issue remains problematic and the lack of Greek language classes, which most perceive to be required for integration, is a commonly referenced concern (AIDA, 2020).

As mentioned from interviewees during the implemented research, the educational programmes should also take into account the psychological burden and the frequent loss of concentration of asylum seekers, as well as their different educational backgrounds. The representative of Lesvos Solidarity NGO in Lesvos mentioned the many different educational levels existing among asylum seekers and refugees and the difficulties deriving from them:

It is very important for them to learn languages, and this is not easy because right now their mind is mostly on what will happen with the asylum and what they will come up against each day. Also, not all people come with a level of education which they can continue and simply learn a new language. Some are illiterate and must start from the beginning. That is, they might not even know how to write in their own language. There are people with learning difficulties, children and adults, so a lot of work is need to get this to a specific level.

3.3. Refugees' and Asylum seekers' Educational Experiences

As already mentioned, access to education remains problematic both for children and adults, especially in the Northeastern Aegean islands where asylum seekers are forced to reside for prolonged periods. However, the different forms of education seem to be important for the everyday life of many asylum seekers and refugees. For example, knowledge of the Greek language, as well as of English, is a necessary tool for the integration of refugees and asylum seekers in Greece. Kingslot, a young Afghan staying in Lesvos with subsidiary protection status, explains his opinion about the benefits of knowing the language of the host country, especially as regards everyday relationships:

Integration can happen easier if you know the language. Ok, maybe you heard about it, we have Mosaik (education centre in Lesvos). But it's a small centre, a small place. We have more than 5000 people, Mosaik is not enough. And instead of English they have to pursue Greek. When you know

the language, you can start talking to the shop keeper. Your neighbours, you can make friends you can talk to everyone. If you speak English, they just answer your question. They won't go further with you. So, language is more important. I think they have to invest more to Greek language courses. Even not English. English are good to know, as international, but the national thing comes first. You need to learn Greek.

The importance of knowing the language for becoming integrated in Greek society is also highlighted by Antoine, an asylum seeker from Guinea, in his thirties, living in Lesbos:

I must learn the language first and after integrate in life in Greece. Yes. At first my asylum, after I must try to learn very well the language and after to work. Because now I don't have country. I forgot my country. Because my father is not here, is finish, my head, my country I forgot because... I don't know what to do now. I don't have father, (not clear), I am alone now, I am alone.

According to our fieldwork insights, the engagement of asylum seekers and refugees in educational processes is something common. A wide range of different actors (specifically NGOs) providing language courses was revealed by interviewees residing in camps or apartments in the mainland. Ramon, an Afghani asylum seeker living in Athens, attended Greek language courses provided both by the University of Athens and by two NGOs located in the city.

I learned Greek in Greece, for a year now, at the university in Zografou, at Metadrasia, at Caritas organisation in Omonoia, in Athens.

Very often, educational spaces of informal education and the participation in their activities seem to also function as safe spaces to hang out or socialise, both for women and for men as well as for the children. Aynla from Somalia, a subsidiary protection beneficiary in his twenties, is one of the many people residing in Moria Hotspot who take Greek language courses in a social centre located in Mytilene:

During the week I usually to the Greek class, Monday at 12:00 and Friday. The other day when I go to school, it's 2 hours 12-2. I am going to Mosaik, Mytilene. I like, yes, the place, because when I come, I don't go to school, I go nowhere. When I want to sleep, I sleep, when I want to talk... I don't know where is good area to go. Now when I started Mosaik I go to Mytilene, I do English.

Additionally, several NGOs also provide language courses, either inside the reception facilities or outside, usually in the town of Mytilene. Usually, asylum seekers and refugees, are addressed to these centres or to NGOs by psychologists or other practitioners working in the field, as Antoine mentions below:

If I wake up this morning, I go to school. Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday. 4 days per week I come here and then I go back. [...] I told my psychologist, I told him that I wanted to learn Greek because I want to stay here. I want to continue my studies here in Greece.

However, the educational facilities in Lesbos are not enough to cover the needs of the population. As such, asylum seekers have to wait a long time for enrolment, as Willy, an asylum seeker from Cameroon mentioned:

I started taking education courses, after six months of being in the island. In Mosaik. We start with Greek. And then poetry, literature. I had a passion with literature. Kind of, you know, in my country most of the people they don't know how to speak English, for all my courses English was my first.

It should be also noted that the implementation of DYEP in the mainland led to a number of protests from groups that were against its operation in public schools. Racist narratives regarding the risk of “Greek students becoming infected by the refugees’ illnesses” emerged in specific schools in Attica and in other parts of Greece, with people even coming to blows in some cases. These events gained publicity through the press, mostly at the beginning of the DYEP programme but also during the following years, and conflicts and racist narratives continue to surface until today. A number of other actors, such as education professionals, NGOs and anti-racist organisations, reacted to these racist conflicts by safeguarding the continuation of the DYEP programme in the schools where the racist reactions took place (ELME, 2017).

Generally speaking, the education of asylum seekers and refugees in Greece still faces several problems and challenges, such as delays in the operation of the Reception Classes on a yearly basis, long waiting lists for enrolment – especially in urban settings – difficulties linked to the mobility of the population (transfers between islands and the mainland), a lack of intercultural services, the absence of preschool education, delays in the establishment of pre-primary schools, challenges with regards to the integration of children enrolled in the Reception/Preparatory Structures, reactions by local communities and a lack of specific integration attention for children aged 15 or more. It should be stressed that the increased funding provided as a response to the refugee influx in Greece covered additional human resources for refugee education, material and management in camps, but was almost non-existent in the case of formal education. As such, children’s access to education – especially in the islands – is compromised, and significant steps remain to be taken.

4. Housing and Spatial Integration

In this section the integration of refugees' through housing and space is analysed. More specifically, housing policies for asylum seekers and refugees are discussed, including the recent reforms on the Greek housing policy. Furthermore, the implementation of housing policies is analysed, by highlighting the problems and challenges that have been already observed, as well as the refugees' and asylum seekers' own housing experiences.

4.1. Housing Policies for Asylum Seekers and Refugees

As already mentioned, in terms of housing, relevant policies in Greece have always been marginal; unlike other European countries, Greece had never implemented or even designed a social housing policy (Emmanuel, 2006). The urban development of the large Greek cities evolved without central planning and was determined by specific land policies and housing production mechanisms that resulted in high levels of home ownership (Balampanidis et al., 2019). The economic crisis of 2008 also had a significant effect on housing, to the extent that the term "housing crisis" is still discussed until today. Generally speaking, the crisis greatly impacted housing, mostly due to the lack of a relevant policy in the Greek context.

Housing and accommodation policies in Greece differ for asylum seekers and recognised beneficiaries of international protection. The official accommodation system in Greece for asylum seekers (while the asylum application is processed) consists of three different types: a) accommodation in the Reception and Identification Centres established in the Northeastern Aegean islands (Hotspots) and in the Northeastern town of Fylakio, b) Temporary Accommodation Centres (camps) in mainland Greece and c) accommodation and housing in apartments and buildings in the urban space (Papatzani et al., 2020).

Apart from the mass accommodation of asylum seekers in Hotspots on the islands and in camps in the mainland, housing in apartments remains relatively limited. Specific housing programmes for asylum seekers have mostly been implemented in emergency situations, such as the project FILOXENIA ("Temporary Shelter and Protection for the Most Vulnerable Migrants in Greece"). FILOXENIA was implemented by IOM for a specific period, as a decongestion programme for the evacuation of large numbers of people from Hotspots to camps and hotels in the mainland (Papatzani et al., 2020).

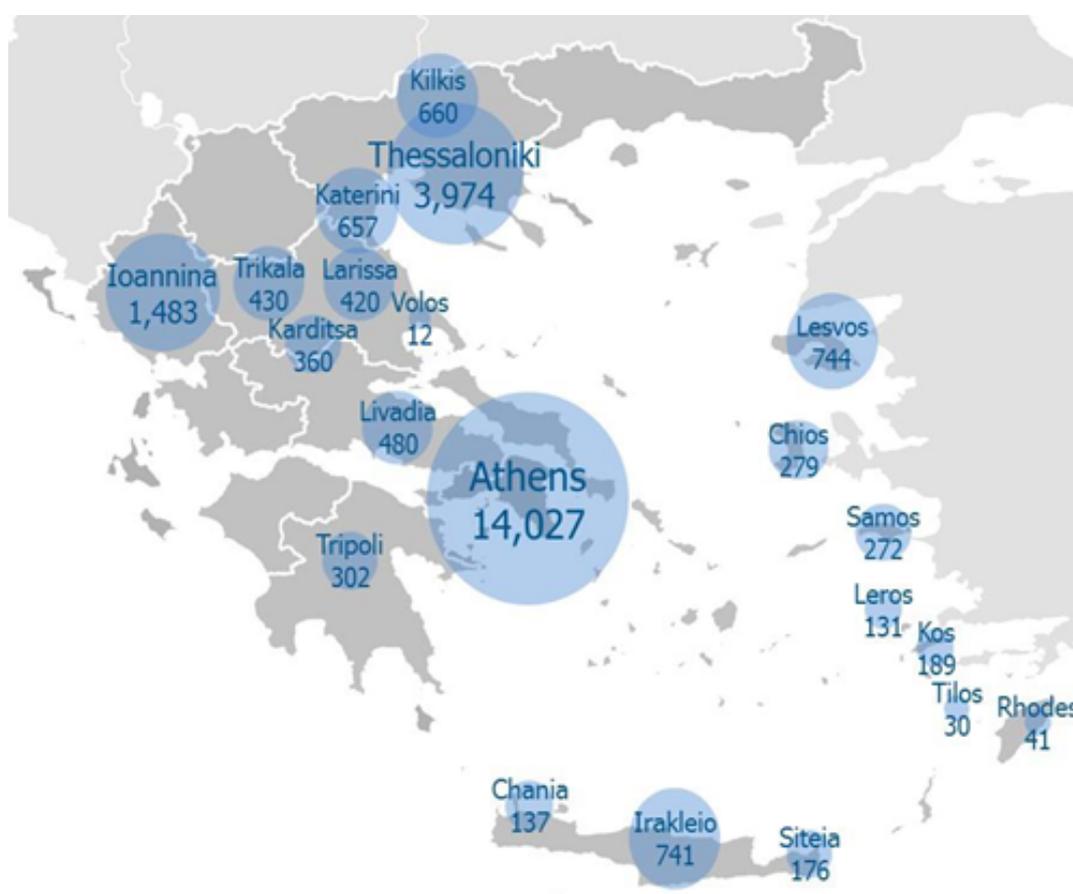
"Emergency Support to Integration and Accommodation programme" (ESTIA)

The most important and relatively extended housing programme for asylum seekers in apartments and buildings in the urban space is the "Emergency Support to Integration and Accommodation programme" (ESTIA). We could argue that this programme (along with HELIOS mentioned below) is the only recent example of a housing policy in Greece. ESTIA is implemented by UNHCR through 23 partnerships with 12 national and international NGOs and 11 municipalities, and is funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund of the European Union. ESTIA provides accommodation in apartments in the urban space and cash assistance to asylum seekers that meet specific vulnerability criteria, as well as to applicants for family reunification. Accommodation is provided in 14 cities in the mainland and seven islands. Over half (55%) of the accommodation places are in Athens, 38% in the rest of the mainland and 7% on the islands. By the end of October 2019, UNHCR had created 25,545 places in the

accommodation scheme as part of the ESTIA programme. In total, since November 2015, 61,895 individuals have benefitted from the accommodation scheme. 21,585 people were accommodated as of the end of October 2019, 7,295 of whom are recognised refugees. The clear majority of those accommodated are families, while 88% of the beneficiaries are Syrians, Iraqis, Afghans, Iranians or Congolese (UNHCR, 2019).

The Ministerial Decision of 12 March 2019, issued by the (former) Ministry of Migration Policy to regulate the ESTIA scheme, provides specific details on the preconditions and deadlines regarding the accommodation of asylum seekers and recognised refugees. According to these regulations, recognised refugees should leave the apartments once they gain protection status. More specifically, those already benefiting from the ESTIA scheme as asylum seekers would be provided with accommodation for another 6 months after the notification of the asylum decision, while in cases of families with children this period could be extended until the end of the school year. In cases of extremely vulnerable recognised refugees, such as pregnant women and women up to two months after giving birth or people suffering from very serious health conditions, accommodation could be extended beyond 6 months after recognition. The lack of a next step for housing recognised beneficiaries of international protection, as well as the absence of a housing policy targeting both Greeks and refugees, has already resulted in increasing numbers of homelessness, especially in the large Greek cities.

Figure 2. Map of accommodation locations, October 2019 (UNHCR, 2019).



“Hellenic Integration Support for Beneficiaries of International Protection” (HELIOS)

The next housing step for recognised refugees, which was only recently planned and launched, is the programme “Hellenic Integration Support for Beneficiaries of International Protection” (HELIOS). It started as a pilot project implemented only in the Municipalities of Livadia and Thiva (Ministry of Migration Policy, 2018). HELIOS 2 was launched in June 2019 and is expected to run until November 2020. “HELIOS is a pilot integration project that aims to support the integration of beneficiaries of international protection (refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection) into Greek society. The project offers services promoting independent living, including rental subsidies, integration courses, employability support and integration monitoring” (IOM, 2019). HELIOS is implemented by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM); it partners with the support of the Greek Government, and is funded by the Directorate General for Migration and Home Affairs of the European Commission (DG HOME). In order to enrol in the HELIOS project, beneficiaries must a) be beneficiaries of international protection (refugees or beneficiaries of subsidiary protection), b) have been recognised as beneficiaries of international protection after 1 January 2018 and c) be officially registered and reside in an Open Accommodation Centre, Reception and Identification Centre (RIC), a hotel of the IOM FILOXENIA project or a form of accommodation provided by the ESTIA programme at the moment of enrolment in the project (IOM, 2019). More specifically, services offered through HELIOS include:

A) Support for independent living and rental subsidies, such as support to find an apartment and personally sign a lease agreement directly with the apartment owner. Upon signing a lease agreement in their name, beneficiaries receive rental subsidies which are deposited into their personal Greek bank account. The rental subsidies contribute to their beginning to live independently (through a standard amount granted in a one-off payment) and to the rental costs (a standard amount which is paid on a monthly basis) (IOM, 2019).

B) Provision of mandatory integration courses in Integration Learning Centres (ILCs) operating across Greece, consisting of a Greek Language Module of 280 hours and a Soft Skills Module of 80 hours related to Cultural Orientation, Life Skills and Job Readiness (IOM, 2019).

C) Job counselling sessions and other employability-related activities in the ILCs to help beneficiaries become familiarised with the Greek labour market and job research modalities. HELIOS beneficiaries are offered five one-hour individual job counselling sessions. Additionally, those with relevant education and/or experience have the opportunity to access official certifications (e.g. driving licenses, ECDL certifications, foreign language certifications) and have the relevant costs covered by the HELIOS project (IOM, 2019).

D) Integration monitoring by Integration Monitoring teams in charge of following up on the progress of beneficiaries and supporting them with any integration-related needs so that they can develop links with the host community, become acquainted with public services and bureaucratic procedures (by providing advice on bureaucratic obligations and services offered at the local level) and be in a position to confidently navigate through the Greek public service providers upon their graduation from the project (IOM, 2019).

“Curing the Limbo” (Municipality of Athens)

Curing the Limbo (2018-2021) is a European pilot programme of the city of Athens implemented with the strategic partnership of the National and Kapodistrian University of

Athens (UoA), the Catholic Relief Services (CRS), the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and the Athens Development and Destination Management Agency (ADDMA). This project is co-financed until 2021 by the European Regional Development Fund through the Urban Innovative Actions (UIA) initiative. Curing the Limbo aims at the integration of refugees in the life of the city through interacting with active citizen groups and participating in public events held in the neighbourhoods of Athens. In coming together, the refugees and the city exit their “limbo” state and engage in activity, cooperation, and co-existence. At the same time, the strategic objective of the programme is to transform the action model presented under the UIA pillar “Integration of Refugees and Immigrants” into a public policy proposal that would be sustainable in every European city. The programme is implemented along four axes:

1. Affordable Housing based on exchange systems to ensure and maintain high levels of participation and interaction between project participants and the host community. Housing in formerly abandoned properties is offered to refugees and, in return, participants will be expected to network and engage in community service and participate in a skills development programme. The affordable housing provision is implemented by Catholic Relief Services (CRS) through a Technical Steering Group including experts on housing, sociology and urban studies to ensure a holistic intervention.

2. The Capacity Building Lab, which provides Greek learning courses as a second language, English learning courses, beginners and advanced ICT courses, audiovisual expression and creativity workshops, and workshops for cultural mediators who will act as ambassadors, bringing together refugees and local communities.

3. Neighbourhood Activities aiming to mobilise the programme participants and encourage their organic integration into the life of the city through their cooperation with civil society actors and the interaction of refugees with the citizens of Athens.

4. Job readiness training including employment expectations, workplace culture and rules, interview practice and establishing reliability. The output of this activity will be a Job Readiness Training Guide, which will include transferrable lessons that may be applied to EU cities. The Guide will include procedures for the preparation of refugees to access the labour market and will outline the specific conditions and how they have been overcome in the city of Athens. Interested employers in growth sectors, training providers, financial services providers and other private sector stakeholders who can provide employment services for refugees will also be identified and mapped.

4.2. The Implementation of Housing Policies

The housing and accommodation conditions at the aforementioned different types of accommodation vary from place to place and from time to time. The International Organisations of IOM and UNHCR are the main actors implementing the housing policies for both asylum seekers and recognised beneficiaries of international protection in Greece. The response of the Greek authorities in terms of accommodation and housing policies remains in the mindset of an emergency mode. The reception system is characterised by the absence of long-term planned solutions and its financing is still based on EU emergency assistance, thus reducing the long-term effectiveness of relevant programmes. The implementation of these policies has been long criticised as inadequate, and the failure of national authorities to provide asylum seekers with adequate living conditions has been broadly reported (Papatzani et al.,

2020).

One of the main problems regarding accommodation for asylum seekers is the spatial isolation of mainland camps and, more specifically, the long distances between the camps and the closest cities, as well as the lack of frequent and adequate public transportation. As the coordinator of a local NGO in Lesbos narrates, the distances between the accommodation places and the host society result in the lack of a frequent communication with Greeks that could develop into closer interethnic relationships:

They don't live in the city, they don't have Greek neighbours to say good morning to, learn the language and the habits of those who live in the country. It is as if Syrians came to a small Syria, it is not as if they are in a different country. The fact that they go to town for a couple of hours and then go back does not help them learn what life is like.

The same argumentation is followed by a member of a squat in central Athens, who analyses the socio-spatial segregation of asylum seekers and refugees caused by the current housing policies.

These camps can turn into villages, something permanent, there can be a process in which someone ends up living in the camp for 10-15 years. It is inconceivable, and it is also very strange that this is presented as a socially safe solution, while it is the exact opposite. That is, the more you cultivate this segregation and the isolation of people, the more the racism, the distrust and the violence grow on both sides. A person who feels he or she is living in a country for 10 years and remains in a container in the middle of nowhere will, inevitably, hate this society [...] A person whose children go to school, whose family lives in the town and who gets to know a person or two immediately becomes part of a whole. A person living in the mountain, in a container, will most probably not be part of any whole.

This negative characteristic also applies for housing in apartments or even in hotels, e.g. in the example of FILOXENIA programme. RSA and PRO ASYL have followed one case of a FILOXENIA beneficiary and noted that "he was transferred to one of the FILOXENIA hotels on the mainland in March 2019, to a resort near the mountaineering centre in the Grevena region. The accommodation is isolated and a one-and-a-half-hour drive away from the nearest city of Grevena. [...] Only once per week (on Fridays), a bus transports the hotel's residents to Grevena where they can spend a few hours before returning to their accommodation" (RSA-PRO ASYL, 2019, p.12). According to RSA & PRO ASYL "the project started running without an integrated exit strategy on how and where the population offered accommodation in hotels will be re-directed after the winter. Hotels, although appropriate for an urgent project, are widely regarded as the overpriced choice when compared to projects that focus on establishing housing through rented flats, which can be implemented on a much slower pace" (2019, p.11).

In the case of the "Emergency Support to Integration and Accommodation Programme", (ESTIA) the spatial distribution of its beneficiaries in the urban space of the Greek cities is in a positive direction. Nevertheless, specific cases of rented apartments far from the city centres have also been reported by a member of a squat in central Athens, as well as the problems created by the "forced" cohabitation in ESTIA apartments:

If there is no broader structure of integration, participation and presence, one might have a house, but there will be no social surroundings. Furthermore, it

is quite common for two or three families to share one apartment. This is, in a way, a forced cohabitation, people will sometimes get along and others not, it is only natural. So this leads to many problems. And, of course, the fact that many of the apartments are far from the centre, and if you do not have some basic social surroundings you are isolated too. These are the main problems I hear about.

Although apart from accommodation, beneficiaries of ESTIA have also been supported in accessing medical services, enrolling children at school, pursuing employment opportunities and attending Greek language courses where available, these activities were not an official part of the programme. Instead, they took place mostly in an ad-hoc way, based on the capability of UNHCR partners and NGOs implementing the programme. These integration activities targeting ESTIA beneficiaries have been reported as insufficient to promote the holistic integration of beneficiaries into the host society (Kourachanis, 2018).

Additionally, as regards the ESTIA programme, another series of negative developments took place after the aforementioned Ministerial Decision of 12 March 2019 that was mentioned earlier. For a number of beneficiaries who were granted refugee status during their accommodation at ESTIA, a transitional period of some months was agreed in mid-2017, during which recognised refugees could remain in ESTIA despite the fact that it is addressed to asylum seekers. Nevertheless, after the Ministerial Decision and in the absence of the next housing step (as HELIOS programme was only recently launched) beneficiaries of international protection were forced to leave the ESTIA programme. Despite the exceptions mentioned earlier for cases of extremely vulnerable groups, a large number of refugees are until today being forced to leave their apartments.

Serious concerns have been expressed through press releases regarding these evictions of refugees in Greece, and a variety of reports urged the Greek authorities to adhere to their obligations under international, EU and national legislation and ensure a minimum dignified and secure living of refugees (RSA, 2019). Additionally, NGO workers have been on strike in response to this since March 2019, noting that this development will leave newly recognised refugees homeless and unable to survive (NGO Workers Union, 2019).

As far as HELIOS is concerned, although its implementation began only recently, it should be mentioned that it only concerns beneficiaries of international protection recognised after 1 January 2018 and thus assists only 5,000 people (AIDA-ECRE, 2020). Additionally, the fact that rental support will be provided only for a six-month period raises serious concerns regarding the success of the programme. As mentioned by IOM, beneficiaries “are strongly encouraged to consider cohabitation so as to share the cost of the rent and all related expenses with friends or relatives” (IOM, 2019, p.3).

Apart from the official housing programmes mentioned above, a number of refugees live in the large Greek cities and especially in Athens, informally, outside official policies. Many live in rented apartments, particularly in central Athens, especially those who arrived before the EU-Turkey Statement of March 2016, when they could move freely to the mainland. This self-housing practice is usually observed among the asylum seekers and refugees who can afford it. In most cases they live with friends, relatives or co-ethnics they met during their migration journey or during their permanence in other types of accommodation. In self-renting apartments specific difficulties emerge, such as cases in which the owners refuse to rent their houses to refugees due to xenophobic and racist perceptions. Additionally, the rising rental prices of apartments in the Greek cities due to the emergence of the short-term rental market

(e.g. through the Airbnb platform) (Balampanidis et al., 2019) also make it extremely difficult for refugees to find affordable housing. This regards both Athens and Mytilene in Lesbos island, where rent prices have increased, as the representative of Lesbos Solidarity NGO mentioned:

Another issue is when they try to find a place like this. Some people will not rent them houses because rents have gone up, in Lesbos at least due to the refugee situation and in Athens because of Airbnb and the rest, they come up against this, so for someone to rent a house there must be some support in finding a decent house at a reasonable price. Not necessarily low but at least reasonable. It often gets out of control, or they will see that the person is a refugee and they refuse to rent the place, they see he or she is a refugee and they will not rent the place. Not everyone.

Another type of accommodation should be mentioned: the squats or other spaces run by groups who stand in solidarity. A large number of squats in abandoned buildings operated in the central neighbourhoods of Athens until recently, housing numerous asylum seekers and families. Due to the central location of the squats, asylum seekers became familiar with the neighbourhood they lived in and developed interethnic relationships with the locals. From spring to autumn 2019, following a governmental decision, the police evicted numerous squats in central Athens and transferred the residents to camps in the mainland and to detention centres, depending on their legal status. Displaced from the central neighbourhoods of the city where they had adapted and developed an urban everyday life, they were transferred again to remote areas, with poor connection to the cities and a lack of infrastructure (Papatzani et al., 2020).

In general, those in need of shelter who lack the financial resources to rent a house remain homeless or reside in abandoned houses or overcrowded apartments, which are on many occasions sublet. ProAsyl and RSA have documented cases of homelessness or residence in precarious conditions in squats in Athens without access to electricity or water (AIDA-ECRE, 2020). At the same time, interviews with actors, organisations and solidarians revealed that there could be specific solutions for homeless people. For example, the large number of vacant houses and apartments belonging to the public sector in Greek cities, and especially Athens, could be used for the needs of the homeless population (both refugees and locals).

4.3. Housing Experiences of Refugees and Asylum Seekers

The narratives of asylum seekers and refugees regarding housing conditions largely differ according to the type of housing and accommodation they reside in. As far as Hotspots and Camps are concerned, the inhuman living conditions were analysed in the previous RESPOND reports on Refugee Protection (Leivaditi et al., 2020) and refugee Reception accordingly (Papatzani et al., 2020). Regarding accommodation in the urban space of the Greek cities, most interviewees living in apartments, either rented through ESTIA programme or self-rented, mention their satisfaction. The interview extract of Ermis, an Afghan applicant for family reunification currently living in an ESTIA apartment in Athens, reveals:

There is a huge difference, no comparison. [...] It gives me hope when I am inside society, with the local immigrants and other refugees. Little by little, I take my old life back, I have never before lived inside a tent or a box. The

box I tell you about, the container, costs 20,000. People do not know that, with this 20,000, right now, at this moment of crisis, they can easily buy two buildings and accommodate the refugees or use the money that the state gives to rent the camps and spend it on houses. They can truly create a better life for the refugees and even more for the locals. That way the locals will not be afraid when they see the refugees. They will not be afraid when they see me, I left to escape from terrorist attacks, I didn't come here to do this.

Narratives of asylum seekers and refugees that self-rent their apartments also reveal practices of cohabitation and living conditions that could not be compared with living in camps. Jack, an asylum seeker from Iraq in his twenties, mentioned:

When I was here, I didn't trust anyone, but when I left to Athens and saw the people there, I start to trust people. I live in Achamon. You know Achamon? Near Omonoia. I rent a flat. With other people, of course.

The ethnic diversity of Athens and the limited horizontal ethnic segregation contribute to the creation of a socially and ethnically mixed urban environment, where refugees may both develop interethnic relationships with locals and strengthen the pre-existing networks of co-ethnics already residing in the city. Nevertheless, the extent to which these relationships and networks are developed remains an open question until today. Different perceptions regarding these relationships, as well as the attachment and sense of belonging to the neighbourhood, are revealed through the interviews. They range from the typical relationships to ones of intimacy and help between refugees and locals, as revealed from the following quotes. For example, Jasmid, an Afghan beneficiary of subsidiary protection, describes typical relationships in the neighbourhood he lives in:

Look, the neighbourhood here is not like the neighbourhood in Iran where everyone knows each other, who lives next door and we all go from one house to another. It is not like that here, here all you say is "hello, how are you?" and that is all the conversation. But it's ok, we have a good relationship, they don't say bad things.

In contrast, another Afghan in his thirties, describes positive relationships with the local community of his neighbourhood.

This neighborhood I live in, I've been there for about 5 years, it is better, I have no problems, it is a quiet area. I get along very well with the local community and it's just as well, they helped me and now I'm standing on my own two feet. I have met great people and made very good friends here in Greece. Greeks, yes. They helped me get back on my feet, they always supported me, psychologically as well, they were always by my side, good times, bad times, always by my side.

However, cases of racist violence have been reported by asylum seekers living in apartments of the ESTIA programme, in central Athens as Ermis, an Afghan applicant for family reunification currently living in an ESTIA apartment in Athens, reveals:

I was the victim of a fascist attack under my house, behind Amerikis sq. Under my house, about ten people hit me, nothing, except I can't hear from

the right year, there is a vein in the head that swells up when you are hurt and gathers blood.

In sum, it has to be mentioned that, according to refugees' and asylum seekers' own experiences and narratives, living in urban space in close proximity with Greek neighbours is of great importance for their everyday lives and their integration in the local society. Nevertheless, integration as regards housing also encounters specific challenges deriving from the extreme social condition prevailing in the country. Everyday relationships at the local level range from close and positive relationships to neutral ones, to xenophobic tensions and even racist attacks. The constant negotiation of those relationships at the local level is of great importance for the integration of refugees and asylum seekers.

5. Medical and Psychosocial Health

In this section, the regulatory level of medical and psychosocial health are presented, as well as the implementation of the relevant policies that regard asylum seekers' and refugees' access to health care provision. Furthermore, asylum seekers' and refugees' experiences of health care provision are analysed as they emerge from the conducted research. What the section reveals is that the current reception system, and especially the Hotspot regime prevailing in North-eastern Aegean islands, not only reproduces the policy shortcomings regarding medical and psychosocial health but also creates new problems in terms of physical and mental health for asylum seekers.

5.1. The Regulatory Level

Greece has a highly centralised health system based on a mixed model which incorporates both tax-based financing and social health insurance. Historically, a number of enduring structural and operational inadequacies within the health system needed addressing, but reform attempts often failed outright or stagnated at the implementation phase.

The country's Economic Adjustment Programme has acted as a catalyst to proceed with many wide-ranging reforms in the health sector. Since 2010, these reforms have included the establishment of a single purchaser for the National Health System (E.O.P.Y.Y.), the standardising of the benefits package, the re-establishment of universal coverage and access to health care, the significant reduction of pharmaceutical expenditure through demand and supply-side measures, and important changes to procurement and hospital payment systems; all these measures have been undertaken in a context of severe fiscal constraints (Economou et al., 2017).

Several challenges remain, such as ensuring adequate funding for the health system; maintaining universal health coverage and access to needed health services; and strengthening health system planning, coordination and governance. Although most reforms implemented so far have focused on reducing costs, a relevant report recommends a focus on longer-term strategic reforms that will enhance efficiency while guaranteeing the delivery of health services and improving the overall quality of care (Economou et al., 2017).

At the same time, since 2015, the inadequate reception and living conditions of refugees in Greece have been characterised by overcrowding and poor hygiene. This raises a number of issues for the population of concern and an extra challenge for the national healthcare system, including changing population health and social care needs (health and social care services for people on the move), setting up appropriate financing mechanisms, coordination between the integration of services and providing adequate health care for refugees. Furthermore, the system faces serious challenges due to the lack of funding, staff shortages and a lack of interpreters and cultural mediators, while the legal status of the population concerned and their geographical dispersion countrywide have a major impact in terms of proper access to care.

Access to healthcare provision and to mental health and psychosocial services

Although the health system in Greece is considered as a universal coverage system, since

2016 the government has designed and set up a parallel health programme for refugees and migrants in different sites across the country. The programme “PHILOS – Emergency health response to refugee crisis” is a programme of the Greek Ministry of Health, implemented by the National Organisation of Public Health in order to address the refugee crisis by attending to the sanitary and psychosocial needs of people living in reception centres. The programme aims to respond comprehensively to the urgent situation caused by the refugee crisis in mainland Greece (Attica, Northern and Central Greece) after the closure of the Greek-North Macedonia borders and the EU-Turkey Statement, which resulted in a large number of refugees being stranded in the country and living in open camps created by the Greek government. Since the summer of 2017, PHILOS has expanded its activities to the Reception and Identification Centres on the Eastern Aegean islands (Mytilene, Chios, Samos) and to the Dodecanese (Kos, Rhodes, Leros, Kalymnos). The personnel of PHILOS are distributed between seven health districts (YPE) of the National Health System in mainland Greece, including the National Centre for Emergency Care (EKAB). Furthermore, a significant part of the financing is closely related to discrete expenditure by refugees and migrants for the use of primary health services.

According to P.D 141/2013 31 par. 1 (art 30 of the directive 2011/95/EU), beneficiaries of international protection have access to medical care under the conditions applicable to Greek citizens. Moreover, par. 2 mentions that beneficiaries of international protection who have special needs, in particular pregnant women, disabled people, victims of torture, rape or other serious forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence or minors who have been victims of any form of abuse, neglect, exploitation, torture, humane, inhuman or degrading treatment or who have suffered because of armed conflict, are entitled to adequate medical care, including treatment for mental disabilities where required, under the conditions applicable to Greek citizens.

Moreover, under Greek law, applicants for international protection have the right to freely access public health services and to receive nursing and health care, including the necessary treatment for diseases and mental health care. According to the (latest) Law 4636/2019 art 55 concerning access to healthcare services and social security, applicants for international protection are provided with a temporary insurance and foreign health care number (P.A.A.Y.P.A.). The P.A.A.Y.P.A. shall be given at the same time as the number indicated in the asylum seeker card issued by the Asylum service and remain active throughout the examination of the application for asylum. The holder of the P.A.A.Y.P.A. has access to health services under the conditions in article 33 of Law 4368/2016 (a ' 21). If the application for asylum is rejected for any of the reasons set out in the Law without suspensory effect, the P.A.A.Y.P.A. shall be automatically deactivated and the beneficiary will no longer have access to the above services.

Despite a favourable legal framework, actual access to healthcare services is reportedly very complicated. Law 4368/2016 on universal healthcare legislation, which establishes the right to free access to all public health facilities, applies to migrants, including asylum seekers and unemployed refugees. However, the public health sector, which has been severely affected by successive austerity measures, is under huge pressure and lacks the capacity to cover all needs for healthcare services, both those of the local population and those of migrants. Access to healthcare services is also hampered by a number of administrative barriers.

Moreover, non-Greek speaking patients are virtually excluded from mental health services. National mental health structures are extremely limited in interpreters due to continuous funding constraints. Another important fact is that most asylum seekers with mental health disorders are excluded from the National Referral System of Accommodation and municipal shelters due to their mental health condition (MDM, 2018). According to the officially posted data on the Map of Mental Health Units on the PSYCHARGOS website, it is estimated that around 90 accommodation facilities for people with severe mental health disorders operate in Athens and Thessaloniki. Their funding is provided by the Ministry of Health and their capacity is up to 15 places; a basic precondition for accessing them is having been hospitalised for a long time in a psychiatric clinic of a national hospital. The placement of beneficiaries in the boarding facilities is based on referrals by the competent departments of the National Psychiatric Hospitals and depends on the availability and capacity of the aforementioned facilities (MDM, 2018). People who do not speak the Greek language and do not have residency permits are excluded from PSYCHARGOS accommodation facilities. The language barrier remains an important obstacle in accessing mental health services (MDM, 2018).

For refugees residing in the major urban centres, such as the beneficiaries of the ESTIA programme, access to appropriate services is relatively feasible due to the organised action of some NGOs and the presence of large hospital structures. For those residing in the rest of the country, the camp-based provision of health services has not been developed to a satisfactory degree and often fails to meet the needs of the population. There is no comprehensive system for rehabilitation to support refugees and applicants with mental health problems linked to trauma. For example, EPAPSY provides Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) integrated services to refugees and asylum seekers in the accommodation scheme as part of the ESTIA programme, as well as capacity building to strengthen the role of health operators and mental health professionals in the delivery of MHPSS at the urban area level (EPAPSY, 2020). In specific areas of the country there are also targeted interventions in the context of emergency aid, such as the programme for the Victims of Torture by Médecins Sans Frontières, the Open Minds project by Médecins du Monde-Greece, as well as the programme ERMES (Effective and Respectful Mental Health Support) by the Greek Forum of Refugees.

Channels for the distribution of information on healthcare services

According to Law 4636/2019 art.43, par. 2, the reception authorities provide applicants, through the provision of a briefing note or orally with information in the applicant's language, on organisations or groups of people that provide specific legal assistance or psychological support and organisations that might be able to help or inform them on the available reception conditions, including health care.

Other channels of distribution of information on healthcare services that have been set up since 2016 are:

- Municipal Social Services and Community Centres countrywide
- NGOs involved in Site Management Support countrywide
- NGOs which provide health and Mental Health & Psychosocial Support Network services in camp settings
- The PHILOS Project
- Médecins du Monde, through the operation of two health offices within the regional

offices of the Asylum Service in Athens and Thessaloniki.

5.2 Access to health care provisions

Mental health and psychosocial support services are not easily accessible for refugees and asylum seekers due to the limited capacity of the public sector in terms of intercultural competence, staff shortages and lack of proper infrastructure. The third sector is highly mobilised and active in the area of MHPSS. However, the vast majority of the activities are restricted projects, and NGOs cannot engage in the long term. Since 2016 a cluster approach has been adopted according to humanitarian coordination principles, resulting in local MHPSS and protection working groups (Attika, Lesbos, Thessaloniki) chaired by UNHCR, EODY and BABEL-SYNEIRMOS with the participation of all the MHPSS actors active in the field. At the same time, NGOs put in significant effort in order to capacitate the system and raise awareness for the mental health of refugees and asylum seekers in Greece (UNHCR, 2018). According to the Mental Health directorate of the Hellenic Ministry of Health, in the second and third phase of PSYCHARGOS programme, the PSYCHADELFEIA programme was implemented to cover the mental health needs of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees and national minorities such as Roma and Greek Muslims. And, as described above, there is the PHILOS project implemented by EODY, which is the main provider of MHPSS services in the Reception and Identification Centres and accommodation facilities countrywide (Moschovakis, 2019).

Access to healthcare services appears to be particularly difficult in the overcrowded reception camps, especially on the Aegean Islands, where the responsibilities for health services were transferred from NGOs to state actors in 2017; in particular the Ministry of Health and the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (KEELPNO). According to NGO representatives, this transfer led to further restrictions on the access to medical services as well as outpatient consultations, due to gaps in the provision of services coupled with a shortage in human resources.

A series of recent reports indicate that many asylum seekers suffer from depression and post-trauma disorders, leading to increasing suicide attempts and self-harm, including among young people. Stress, anxiety, insomnia, nightmares, loss of hope and fear are among the depressive feelings evoked by many asylum seekers living in the Reception and Identification Centres.

As mentioned in the methodology section, the interviews that we conducted focused mainly on the island of Lesbos. These include cases and experiences of different (state and non-state) actors who are engaged with asylum seekers, as well as of asylum seekers who are forced to reside in Lesbos. Regarding medical care and psychosocial support, most of our interlocutors reported the serious lack of state presence as well as the serious shortages facing medical services, both in the Hotspot of Moria and in the rest of the island. According to our respondents, the basic challenges that the medical services face in Lesbos are lack of capacity and bureaucracy.

Attempts to cover the serious lack of state presence and the gaps of KEELPNO in the Hotspot mainly consist of employing military doctors (there is usually one army doctor on call for hundreds or thousands of people) or NGOs. Several NGOs provide medical triage and primary healthcare, including vaccinations, throughout the reception and hospitality sites in Greece. However, they also face capacity shortages in their operations and they don't have

the mandate to sign vulnerability assessments on behalf of the state. As a result, access to medical protection remains problematic and very limited, especially for those with chronic illnesses.

A public hospital doctor in Mytilene who used to work for an international NGO reports that:

We, too, receive so many cases that cannot be examined in Moria for lack of capacity... but we also must serve a big part of the Greek population. Of course, we will also attend to refugees. But when the number is so large... there is a problem in Moria, and especially during night shifts we have ambulances being used as means of transportation, bringing in cases that should normally be treated within the Moria Hotspot, if conditions were better and there were fewer people. But, of course, you cannot treat a centre with 10,000 persons, there is no such centre in Greece or anywhere else in Europe, I think. Can you control everything, security above all, which is so important, sanitary conditions, what can you control? And how can you put an order to things? I see this, they say 'no doctor in Moria' or I do not know when the doctor will see me. I understand my colleagues, they cannot treat everyone, it is impossible, or they have no medicine. But we do not have medicine here either, this is a public hospital and we do not have enough medicine, we try our best, but we don't have medicine, we are a public hospital, you see there is a problem.

The long delays for an appointment with doctors and the general lack of medical support can be life-threatening for asylum seekers, especially for those with chronic diseases. The doctor interviewed in Mytilene also reports:

It is the inability not only of the asylum procedures but also of medical services to respond to the situation. These problems also exist in Athens, but there are more possibilities... There are cases of illness or necessary surgery that cannot be treated here and, although medical cases should be given absolute priority, the legal procedures and geographical restriction finally prevail. And even in cases where there is a clear diagnosis of someone who, for example, might lose a leg if he is not transferred to Athens to undergo surgery, there are significant delays, often with dire consequences for these people. The procedure is totally bureaucratic ... this system has no normality, it is ruled by the external factor of orders, decisions such as this month only 100 people can leave, for example, or no one... considering the volume of demands, it is chaotic, between the UNHCR, the Asylum Service, First Reception, the police, everything moves back and forth and is prioritised accordingly. It is all about how lucky someone will get and who he/she will encounter, if the person in charge will be quick to react...

Serious concerns are also expressed about the impact of the crucial lack and inefficiency of medical and mental care provision on the lives of asylum seekers. A representative of the NGO Lesvos Solidarity says:

There are also many cases where the violence emerges here, so vulnerability must be re-examined and also properly substantiated, or there might be a medical issue arising here or being diagnosed here, or cases of

rape occurring here, all this requires a process of proper substantiation, because the people will not go themselves, they will not go and say this or that is going on, someone must dedicate time to them, substantiate everything, etc. [...] And the paradox is that, here, instead of people being protected we see people being retraumatised, there are physical and mental health problems that are created or aggravated here, there is rape and violence here and no one undertakes the protection of these people, a protection that they truly need. Moria produces violence and traumatising experiences, and the system will not assume the responsibility.

Last but not least, one of the interviewees, a psychologist employed by an international NGO, used the term “institutional abuse” to stress the multiple levels of violation and abuse of the rights of asylum seekers:

This is a case of institutional abuse. A situation is created that could be characterised as a condition of continuous traumatic stress. Continuous traumatic stress is differentiated from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in that it is not a recognised disorder but rather an environment that constantly places you at risk of developing a more serious mental illness.

The reported shortages in staff and equipment and the disruptions in the Greek healthcare system (resulting from the successive austerity measures adopted since the beginning of the economic crisis) undermine the right to health enshrined in Article 11 of the European Social Charter, of which Greece is part. This requires acknowledgment of the systemic failure of KEELPNO/EODY to deliver adequate results through the PHILOS 1 and 2 projects (RSA, 2019). The ineffective implementation of the PHILOS 1 and 2 projects shows that an overhaul of the strategy for the health coverage of asylum seekers and refugees is urgently needed.

5.3. Asylum Seekers’ and Refugees’ Experiences of Health Care Provision

The experiences and narratives of refugees and asylum seekers revealed a wide range of problems related to health care provision, especially in the case of Moria Hotspot on Lesbos island. In the group interview with the community leaders of Afghans, Pakistanis, Iranians and Iraqis in Moria Hotspot, the major challenges were reported in detail. One of the most important problems mentioned is the long delays in appointments with doctors:

The condition in Moria is very bad. It's not good. Moria, now, the doctors are not working. 3 weeks now. We have appointment to the week before, no doctor. Today again. Before I came here, I went again, no doctor. This is a problem. Very big. Around six months ago for example, he went to the doctor, he told I am not feeling well, I have a pain in my chest, they said you have nothing, he fell and he died. Too many times I go to the doctor they say me I don't have a doctor, the second time, I don't have time, the third time, we can't write this medicine. Why?

Furthermore, several refugees and asylum seeker respondents mentioned that they often have no access to interpreters during their appointments with doctors. The lack of interpreters, as well as the problems with KEELPNO, were also reported during the group interview with the community leaders in Moria.

The first problem is the asylum, KEELPNO is the first problem [...] KEELPNO is the first problem because they don't have [...] translators. When she goes over there, they'll give her one more time for four months later, then she'll go [...] one week later. So, the problem they face is translation. KEELPNO is not accepting any translators from inside Moria.

The overall provision of medical care in Moria seems to be seriously limited. The KEELPNO doctors in charge of the vulnerability assessment were referred to by some of our interlocutors as “yes/no doctors”, denouncing the limited provision of health care. “Yes” refers to those who will be recognised as vulnerable following the assessment, and “no” to those who will not be recognised as such and will therefore continue with the “Fast-Track Border Procedure”. This is what Fatima, a female asylum seeker from Afghanistan that stays in Moria explains below:

There is the doctor, we call him yes/no doctor. All the refugees they know about him like that. That you get yes or no. If you get yes, it's ok, if you get no, so you have to stay here (in Lesvos). There is this yes/no doctor and there are those who have big problems, so there is a psychiatrist doctor also. We call him doctor asap. Asap means brain... The situation is like this and especially for the doctors. There should be some doctors. Health is very important, I think. In Moria, if someone is going to die, no attention of doctor. Go and drink water, go and drink water.

The inadequate access to health care has serious implications for the lives and health of asylum seekers. As Robel, an asylum seeker from Eritrea mentioned, due to the inhuman living conditions in reception facilities, vulnerability and violence emerge in-situ, even in the cases of asylum seekers who didn't have physical or mental health issues at the time of their arrival.

If you are not sick, healthy, and you are coming, you are not sick mentally or physically, if someone is not sick, he is healthy. If you are coming from your country healthy, when you arrive here and you see this situation, how you live, how you get food, how you make your interview, how they treat, immediately you are (become) sick mentally or physically.

The narratives of asylum seekers and refugees reveal the inhuman conditions in which they are forced to remain, especially in the Hotspots of the North-eastern Aegean island of Lesvos. What also emerges is the fact that Hotspots as accommodation facilities not only reproduce the policy shortcomings regarding medical and psychosocial health but also create new problems in terms of physical and mental health for people living there. This has been repeatedly reported by many NGOs and International Organisations working in the field and has also been confirmed in the interviews conducted for the RESPOND Project; immediate action is required from the part of the Greek authorities.

6. Citizenship, Belonging and Civic Participation

The aim of this section is to discuss the processes of naturalization and citizenship in the regulatory level in Greece, as well as the role of institutions at the local level, and immigrants' and receiving society's organisations in the aforementioned processes. Furthermore, it highlights aspects of refugees' and asylum seekers' civic participation, including their perceptions of integration, their relationships with the host community and their political engagement in an era of increased social polarization and xenophobia.

6.1. Naturalisation and Citizenship

As mentioned, recognised refugees can apply for Greek citizenship after having lived in the country continuously and legally for at least three years, while beneficiaries of subsidiary protection can apply for Greek citizenship after seven years of living in Greece; both must fulfil the conditions of social integration that are stipulated by law (see p.23 in this report). A fee of €100 is required for the submission of the application for refugees, while in the case of beneficiaries of subsidiary protection, the fee is €700. A €200 fee is required for the re-examination of the case.

The naturalisation procedure requires that a statement be submitted before the Municipal Authority of the place of permanent residence and an application for naturalisation before the authorities of the Prefecture (Law 3284/2004, art 6). The statement for naturalisation is submitted to the Mayor of the city of permanent residence in the presence of two Greek citizens acting as witnesses. At a preliminary stage, it is examined whether the formal conditions of article 5 are met. If so, the case is forwarded to the Naturalisation Committee, which examines whether the substantial conditions of article 5A are met. Initially, the examination included an interview of the applicant before the Committee. Following the amendment of the Citizenship Code by Law 4604/2019, the examination procedure is no longer oral; instead, the applicants are required to undergo a written test, answering 20 out of 30 written questions correctly from a pool of 300 questions (Circular 38788/2018, Circular 49965/1.7.2019). This pool of questions is yet to be published and the new procedure is yet to be finalised through the issuance of a Ministerial Decision. A book with information on Greek history, civilisation and geography has been issued by the Ministry of Interior for foreigners willing to apply for naturalisation. Simplified instructions on the acquisition of Greek citizenship have also been released by the Ministry of Interior in collaboration with the Greek Ombudsman.

In case of a positive recommendation by the Naturalisation Committee, the Minister of Interior will issue a decision granting the applicant Greek citizenship, which will also be published in the Government Gazette. In case of a negative recommendation by the Naturalisation Committee, an appeal can be lodged within 15 days. The Minister of Interior will issue a decision if the appeal is accepted. In case of a rejection of the appeal, an application for annulment can be lodged before the Administrative Court of Appeals within 60 days of the notification of that decision.

The procedure remains extremely slow. The naturalisation procedure is reportedly very lengthy, lasting in average 1,494 days due to a considerable backlog pending since 2010 (CoE, 2018). The process of correcting mistakes made on birth certificates and other official identification documents, which need to go through judicial channels and can take months to

complete, is one of the more crucial factors affecting the duration of the process. In July 2018, the Ministry of Interior stated that only 73% of 113,724 citizenship applications submitted between March 2010 and April 2018 had been resolved (CoE, 2018). Additionally, it should be mentioned that the exam procedure is lengthy, complex and demanding, and involves deep knowledge of the Greek history, culture, politics, literature and so forth.

In May 2019 a Ministerial Decision was issued (34226/2019) authorising the heads of the Regional Directorates of Citizenship to sign the decisions granting citizenship, in order to accelerate the procedure in view of delays related to sending files to be signed by the Minister of Interior. In August 2019, the newly elected Minister of Interior revoked the aforementioned decision (Ministerial Decision 82215/14661/2019). As a result, all pending procedures concluded under the provisions of the Decision of May 2019 had to be repeated, causing further delays. In spite of the difficulties, “according to Eurostat data published in April 2018, Greece tied in fourth place among EU Member States regarding the rate of naturalisation (4.2%) as a percentage of the population in 2016, with a total of 33,210 individuals who received Greek citizenship” (CoE, 2018).

According to the latest available statistical data provided by the Greek authorities, 5,325 naturalization applications were submitted by foreigners in 2011 and 4,253 in 2019 (Ministry of Interior, 2019). In 2018 a total of 2,528 foreigners were granted citizenship by way of naturalisation, compared to 3,483 in 2017. The acceptance rate in 2018 was 66.5%, compared to 79.5% in 2017. This number is not limited to beneficiaries of international protection; the majority of naturalised persons originate from Albania (1,640), followed by Ukraine (116), Russia (92), Moldova (78), and Romania (74), while only 528 come from other countries (Ministry of Interior, 2018b). No specific data is provided with regards to the naturalisation of refugees or beneficiaries of international protection. However, taking into consideration the countries of origin of beneficiaries of international protection in Greece, it is reasonable to expect that the percentage of those who acquired citizenship in 2018 was low.

Access to rights with and without formal citizenship

According to the domestic legal framework (Presidential Decree 141/2013 and Law 4636/2019), beneficiaries of international protection shall enjoy a series of rights. Inter alia, they are protected from refoulment, they have the right to family unity, the right to receive a residence permit, they are granted access to education, wage employment or self-employment, medical care and social assistance, under the same terms and conditions that apply for Greek citizens, and they have access to housing and right to free movement within the Greek territory under the terms and conditions that apply for legally residing third-country nationals (arts 21-36 of Presidential Decree 141/2013 and Law 4636/2019). Recognised refugees receive a residence permit which is valid for three years and can be renewed upon expiry (art 24). The residence permit issued for beneficiaries of subsidiary protection is valid for one year, according to newly introduced Law 4636/2019. In addition, refugees may receive travel documents, which are valid for five years and renewable, allowing them to travel within the Schengen zone for a period of three months every six months.

It is obvious that the scope of international protection is narrow compared to the scope and legal status of citizenship. Beneficiaries of international protection who acquire citizenship through naturalisation (or by falling under the other categories stipulated in the Citizenship Code, such as school attendance) are fully equated with Greek citizens in terms of rights and

obligations. For example, they have the right to free movement within Greece and the EU as Greek citizens do, without limitations as to the period of stay. In addition, they have the right to vote and stand for office and the right to work in civil service. In general, upon acquisition of citizenship full access to all the rights of Greek citizens is granted.

6.2. The Role of Actors for Asylum Seekers' and Refugees' Civic Participation

According to Penninx and Garcés-Mascreñas (2016, p.17) it is the interactions between immigrants themselves, with their varying characteristics, and the receiving society “that determines the direction and the temporal outcomes of the integration process”. Beyond the individual level, processes of immigrant integration also take place at the levels of organisations (both organisations of immigrants and of the receiving society) and institutions (Penninx and Garcés-Mascreñas, 2016).

The Role of Institutions at the Local Level

Institutions (both public and specifically “of and for” immigrants, such as certain religious or cultural groups) play a crucial role in the integration process (Penninx and Garcés-Mascreñas, 2016). Institutions dealing with the integration paths of immigrants and refugees, especially at the local level, have recently expanded in Greece. Article 75 of the 2006 Code of Communes and Municipalities established certain competencies for municipalities regarding the integration of migrants at the local level. The active involvement of large cities and towns with a high concentration of migrant populations has since then drastically increased.

As mentioned in section 2.3, the role of the Migrant Integration Councils (MICs) is important. Nevertheless, since 2013 the MICs have been facing serious difficulties. Apart from the MICs located in the larger municipalities of the country, their vast majority remains inactive. There are huge differences in the operations of the MICs across different municipalities, even between Athens and Thessaloniki (Leontitsis et al., 2020). These differences lead to unequal access for immigrants depending on their place of residence. Additionally, the institutional limitations of the MICs' operation (such as the participation only of organised immigrant communities) limit their actions.

Furthermore, local offices under the jurisdiction of the municipalities called “Migrant Integration Centres” (MICes) were planned by the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Social Solidarity (2015-2019), funded by Partnership Agreement (NSRF) 2014-2020. The MICes are also responsible for the implementation of actions promoting integration such as language courses and other training related to employment opportunities. The institution of the MICes, although new, aims to cover the lack of a solid state integration plan (Bagavos et al., 2019).

The Municipality of Athens has two Migrant Integration Centres which aim to offer the following specialised services to migrants and refugees:

- Orientation and information services relevant to immigrants and asylum seekers in different languages

- Interpreting and translation to facilitate access to mainstream services for migrant groups
- Guidance towards other services according to the need of the beneficiaries, such as accommodation, job advice, job hunting, financial aid, etc.
- Initial support as required and guidance towards social services for newcomers
- Synergies with other public organisations, NGOs, migrant and refugee associations focusing on immigrant communities
- Direct provision of language and computing courses
- Workshops with an intercultural character involving immigrants and local citizens, young people and parents with their children that will foster social and cultural integration (OECD, 2018, p.43).

More recently, specific examples of local institutions have been launched in the large Greek cities and especially in Athens, such as the Coordination Centre for Migrant and Refugee issues (ACCMR) that aims to function as a coordination hub for the fruitful exchange of good practices and know-how between local and international NGOs, international organisations and municipal bodies (Bagavos et al., 2019).

The Role of Organisations of Immigrants and of the Receiving Society

Immigrant organisations may be strong or weak; they may focus primarily on (certain aspects of participation in) the receiving society or the specific cultural and religious needs of the group; they may become an accepted part of civil society – and a potential partner for integration policies – or isolate themselves or be excluded by the host society (Penninx and Garcés-Masareñas, 2016). Organisations of the receiving society, such as NGOs or other groups of volunteers and solidarians play a crucial role in the (informal) integration of immigrants, especially in contexts with weak integration policies.

As mentioned in Section 2.3, a wide range of different organisations are engaged in integration programmes and actions, often in close collaboration with local governments. Different integration initiatives and activities are undertaken by different organisations. The Melissa Network of migrant women in Athens, for example, is a community-based integration centre created in central Athens which brings together migrant women from 45 nationalities and is one of the few organisations in Athens catering specifically to the integration of refugee women. The centre receives more than a hundred refugee women on a daily basis who commute from shelters and camps such as Elaionas Camp. They are taught how to code, speak Greek, develop leadership skills – and even how to decipher fake news (OECD, 2018, p.44). Other NGOs, such as HumanRights 360, implement their own “integration programmes”. HumanRights 360 has been implementing its integration services with the support of the KAHANE foundation in the camps of Elaionas and Skaramagas since August 2018, as well as in the premises of ECHOHub-Athens in the city centre. Through an individualised process, the programme aims to empower and enable international protection applicants/holders to become autonomous and enjoy a better quality of life. The main pillars of the social integration strategies are: learn and gain all necessary administration papers (such as the tax registration number); have legal advice on the integration process; employability counselling and

preparation for the labour market; psychosocial support, through engaging with the community and city life; continuing education pathways; referrals to advance soft and hard skills (such as following language classes or vocational training); referrals to other services and parallel support for life-related challenges (accommodation, health system, nutrition etc.) (Human Rights 360, 2020)

Migrant organisations and associations are also involved in the implementation of different integration activities. For example, the activities of the Greek Forum of Refugees (GFR) include Refugee Participation, Raising Awareness, Rights Protection and Advocacy. GFR aims to create a Panhellenic network of individuals, legal professionals and communities working to support asylum seekers, political refugees and stateless persons, as well as any other person who may meet the criteria set by the Convention of Geneva and the protocols attached to it or the Greek framework for protection. Its founding goals converge on the following six points: 1. Defending the rights and protecting the freedom of refugees and asylum seekers as enshrined by international law. Monitoring developments in the Greek, European and international legislation responsible for refugee-related issues. Updating refugees on their rights and obligations; 2. Informing and raising awareness on access to refugee status and general immigrant and refugee issues. Raising awareness among Greek as well as international governmental and non-governmental organisations on the situation of refugees in Greece. As well as raising awareness and providing relevant information to improve the situation of refugees; 3. Creating relationships with agencies and non-governmental organisations in order to start a meaningful dialogue between state institutions and human rights organisations; 4. Supporting the unity of refugees. Creating social and cultural ties between all members of the Greek Forum of Refugees, as well as between the members of each ethnic community of refugees in Greece; effectively lobbying with the state for the promotion of refugee issues. Demanding the provision of adequate resources to the asylum committee, including personnel in the appropriate and necessary languages and 6. Providing a platform for refugees and their communities to self-organise. The Greek Forum of Refugees encourages refugees and asylum seekers to organise themselves in order to collectively elect their own leaders and engage in the public debate (Greek Forum of Refugees, 2020).

The Greek Forum of Migrants is a network of migrant organisations and communities in Greece envisioning a society where migrants have equal rights and enjoy fair treatment and interact and co-operate with Greek citizens in terms of mutual respect, making diversity a source of growth and progress for all. Its main aims are a) promoting change in the Greek and European legal framework and policies, b) empowering migrants and their organisations to promote their integration with individual and collective responsibility, c) contributing to the fight against discrimination and racism, d) promoting communication, collaboration and understanding between migrant communities and Greek civil society. The Greek Forum of Migrants implements a wide variety of actions and programmes and, additionally, often publishes reports and opinions on legislative and public issues concerning migrant integration; furthermore, it often organises or participates in public debates on relevant issues (Greek Forum of Migrants, 2020).

The majority of NGOs lack a cohesive and long-term strategic plan that could provide appropriate support to people of concern. NGOs usually struggle to obtain grants and donors, especially because they typically don't have enough capacity for fundraising and outreach (Papatzani et al., 2020). A UNHCR participatory assessment report on the concerns of asylum seekers and refugees in Greece, as well as focus group discussions led by 41 UNHCR

partners from authorities, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and other United Nations (UN) agencies, has reported specific risks and challenges ranging from accommodation to integration issues (UNHCR, 2018). According to this report, participants sought support in relation to accessing the labour market, Greek language classes, more provision of information and inclusion in programmes and activities across Greece. Language was considered vital. As for the programmes and actions implemented by NGOs and other actors, participants also noted shortages in the following: interpreters; community-based protection structures; measures to encourage co-existence with the host community; information and interpretation provision; access to formal education for all; complaint and reporting mechanisms; access to national services such as health and medical care (UNHCR, 2018). More specifically, participants noted “a lack of programmes to encourage co-existence with the host community. This is across the country but is more prevalent in sites and RICs. Participants reported limited interaction with locals and among refugee communities in several locations. They attributed this to the lack of a common language. The existing co-existence projects are either limited in outreach or small-scale. In some locations like RICs and sites, minority groups reported discrimination in food distribution and limited access to relief items” (UNHCR, 2018, 8). “Most participants, particularly on the mainland and on some islands, expressed the wish to integrate locally, learn Greek and become self-reliant. In some locations they referred to the good relations with host community members, while in others (e.g. on some islands) they reported limited interaction. Generally, it was mostly those in urban accommodation that reported links to Greek society. The lack of Greek language classes, which most perceive to be required for integration, was a commonly referenced issue” (UNHCR, 2018, 9).

As regards the part of the local society organisations, the role of the solidarity initiatives has also to be mentioned. Since the beginning of the so-called refugee crisis, a considerable part of Greek society has responded spontaneously with empathy towards newcomers passing through the country and often engaged in practices of solidarity (such as donations of goods or money). Additionally, a vast majority of solidarity groups undertook a wide range of different activities providing both solutions to urgent needs (like sheltering) and more long-term activities related to the informal integration of refugees. The example of the squats in central Athens initiated by groups of solidarians is characteristic. The activities taking place there encouraged the participation of refugees in everyday life, both within the squats and in the neighbourhood. As a result, everyday interethnic interaction was strengthened in an informal way at the local level.

There was a very bad atmosphere in the neighbourhood, and we thought we would have to deal with a hostile situation. This changed drastically. On the one hand, they saw it would be an organised space, not a chaotic situation where everything goes. On the other hand, we did these little things that the neighbourhood likes, we planted flowers, we fixed the flowerbeds, we put lights in the small alley [...] This was not built in one day but gradually. The situation is completely different now. Old ladies would come with their bags from the market and they would come at the gate and say “child, I want to help, I want to go upstairs”, so they would help. The clinic we had here, at the Plaza, we also opened that up to the neighbourhood, when medicine was needed we would give. I would say that, curiously, we have increased the sense of security in the neighbourhood rather than decreased it”. (Solidarian member of a squat in central Athens).

But these examples are limited; the civic engagement of refugees as emerges from the interviews with interlocutors and organisations working in the field is limited. Additionally, there seem to be significant differences between different places in the country, as well as between different reception systems. Generally speaking, refugees living in the large Greek cities, and especially Athens, seem more capable of developing trends of civic participation at the local level compared to those living in the Hotspots at the Northeastern Aegean islands, especially due to the existence of more opportunities for integration activities. The cases in which refugees in the Northeastern Aegean islands engage in common practices or demands are related to survival issues inside the Hotspot facilities that largely differ from the integration dimensions and trends examined in this report. As a representative of Lesvos Solidarity NGO mentioned, refugees do not organise themselves sufficiently in order to demand the improvement of their lives, and the existing examples show individual rather than collective actions.

The main problem with refugees is that they do not organise enough. For their condition here is temporary and the element of survival and of coping for people and their families is very strong, so it takes up a lot of their energy. Some people do organise individually, and some engage in political actions, also individually. But this is not strong enough to bring about change, and it mainly has to do with dealing with current problems, which are numerous. Even the community leaders focus more on the conditions, the attacks, police violence or deportations.

Following a similar line of argumentation, the coordinator of a support centre for refugees and locals in Lesvos mentioned that, inside Hotspots, people are self-organized with co-ethnics or with people speaking the same language in order to solve crucial survival problems.

They are finding other people and especially those who speak the same language and they work together. They are trying to find solutions. And especially inside Moria they are trying to deal with their community and trying to figure it out. Then they try to go to the UNHCR for help, but they always get rejected. Because UNHCR mostly wants to implement its policies and try to keep them calm so as not to protest or leave Moria. And with the Kurdish people who got attacked by other residents of Moria. They all got out together and didn't want to come back. And I mean they had to organise that for survival.

Their organisation to advance their demands is mediated through the role of community leaders. Nevertheless, as narratives reveal, the main aim of the meetings of community leaders with UNHCR and other actors is to prevent the emergence of conflicts inside the Hotspot facility.

In general, based on what is analysed above, the role of institutions and organisations of immigrants and of the receiving society is crucial for strengthening refugees and asylum seekers' civic participation. Nevertheless, the inhuman living conditions in specific accommodation sites, the emerging and everyday survival needs, the constant waiting for the asylum procedure and the situation of living "in limbo" remain the main barriers for the systematic engagement of refugees and asylum seekers. On the other hand, their own experiences and narratives, analysed in the section that follows, reveal more complex processes of engagement in the local level, especially in the large Greek cities.

6.3. Refugees' and Asylum Seekers' Civic Participation

Perceptions of integration

Following the barriers mentioned in the previous section, in most interviews conducted in Lesvos, the majority of life narratives of asylum seekers were related to issues of asylum, protection and reception. Nevertheless, in some cases the aforementioned issues were also linked to the notion of integration. As Antoine, an asylum seeker from Guinea in his thirties, mentioned, the legal status remains a priority but the importance of language and work is also crucial:

I am here now, I want to stay in Greece, I must learn the language first and after to integrate in life in Greece. The most important is my asylum, after I must try to learn very well the language and after to work.

The limited interaction with the host society is brought up by Kingslot, a beneficiary of subsidiary protection living in Moria Hotspot in Lesvos. The spatial isolation of the Hotspot and the spatial distance between refugees and locals turns into social distance and boundaries that do not facilitate interethnic relationships with the local population.

It's difficult. Integration. It's difficult, really difficult, I, until now... I don't speak Greek. Because we are not living with locals. We are not communicating, we are not connected with locals. I just speak English. It's how I communicate with everyone. It's like, there isn't, I speak only English because we are not connected, we are not integrating.

The future plans of asylum seekers and refugees vary greatly. A significant part of the interviewees want to stay in Greece after their asylum decision, even if Greece was not their initial destination. In most cases though, the precondition of finding a job in the country prevails and the relevant difficulties regarding the high levels of unemployment are mentioned as in the following words of Kingslot.

I¹: Do you have any other family members in Europe?

R: Yes, I do have, my sister, she lives in Belgium and my other sister lives in Norway.

I: Did you ever think to go and live with them?

R: That's a question that I've been asked a lot. If I go, it depends on the options. I prefer to live here instead of going. If I got a job I will stay here, this I am sure, but if I don't, I will have to move, because everyone does that. Because I need to move on with my life, so if there is no reason for me here, I have to move. If there is no option for me, I think that's my last option to do. To go and live with my sister and find a job in other countries.

Refugees' and asylum seekers' plans usually also transform, during their migration journey. Another significant part of interviewees plan on leaving Greece, if there is a positive decision on their asylum application, and head towards other countries of Europe. Most of

¹ (I) refers to the Interviewer and (R) to the Respondent.

them have relatives or friends in other countries, even if they are not applicants for family reunification.

Relationships with the host community

Since the beginning of the so-called “refugee crisis” a considerable part of Greek society has responded spontaneously with empathy towards the newcomers passing through the country and often engaged in practices of solidarity (such as donations of goods or money). Based on our fieldwork, the research participants in Lesbos and Athens reported a wide range of contacts and relationships with the host society. These relationships are not limited only to the local level, where asylum seekers and Greek neighbours reside in spatial proximity (see section 5.1 of this report), but extend to a larger scale too. For example, positive relationships of mutual help are mentioned by Amin, an asylum seeker from Afghanistan currently living in Lesbos island:

People are very helpful, I have often asked for directions on the street and they have helped me, I wave hello, they have no problem. The people are good, there are others from the shops who know me, they say hello, I buy things, sometimes I see other workers and I say hello and they wave back and there is no problem, but there are others who are not good.

Positive and close relationships are usually reported as the outcome of common characteristics between different cultures, as Faz, from Iran, narrates:

Greek people are amazing. They are cool, I like them. ... Yes, I like it because the way they live, their culture, it's close to ours. The Greeks and Persians I think are very close cultures, the way of thinking and a lot of other things that makes me feel like I am there, in my hometown.

More complex relationships revealing both positive and negative interactions with the host country were reported in some cases by the same interviewee, as mentioned in the interview extract of Faz that follows:

I: Did you ever face any bad behaviour from the locals here or anywhere?

R: I faced in Cosmote (local telephone company), I went there to the shop to buy a SIM card for me and the guy asked for my ID and I gave it to him, and he was like "Can you go outside of the shop, and I will call you when it's ready". Sorry, what did you just say, if I can wait outside? You are joking, right? I am the customer. So, I told him like, if you are telling a customer to go and wait outside, this is not polite and this is not written in any book, like in any corner of the world. Imagine how many people a day is giving this behaviour! He was quiet, he didn't answer anything. He didn't answer, he didn't spoke to me, just took my name, gave me my SIM card, and sent me to pay. That's all. But this is how it is. Small thing. Small problems. But if you start noticing the small problems we cannot be together anymore. Someone should quit and say OK. Instead of argument. If we always argue no one gonna with it. So, someone need to say OK, it's fine. Because the people create hate in their hearts. It's just like, I don't know. But once you leave your home everything is possible.

In time, the massive wave of solidarity of the first years receded, giving way in many cases

to xenophobic discourses. Racist attitudes, prejudices and even racist violence still prevail in different contexts all over the country (RVRN, 2018). Additionally, politically conservative and racist discourses have always been reproduced by political parties, official institutions and media actors alike, even before the beginning of the so-called refugee crisis. The practices of racist violence in local contexts were strengthened since the electoral win of neo-Nazi organisation Golden Dawn (GD) and exist until today, even after the electoral defeat of GD in the recent 2019 national elections (Kandylis and Kavoulakos, 2011). Narratives of the interviewees, apart from the positive relationships with the local population that were mentioned above, also include xenophobic behaviours or racist practices by the host population. Aynla, a beneficiary of subsidiary protection from Somalia living in Lesvos, describes xenophobic behaviours as they are expressed through everyday interactions between people. At the same time, Ermis, an Afghan applicant for family reunification currently living in an ESTIA apartment in Athens, reveals that he has been the victim of racist violence twice, in the city of Athens.

It was the 17th of November and I was the victim of a fascist attack, I had problems with my head and was afraid in general, I didn't want to go out so I wouldn't suffer a second one and I gave up. The first time was under my house, about ten people hit me, now I cannot hear from the right ear, it is a vein in the head which swells up when you are hurt and it swells up and fills with blood, they were wearing t-shirts and holding flags. I went to the central police station and made a report. This happened in Amerikis sq., the first attack was in 2017, November 2017, and the second one in August 2018 in Kamatero, they started swearing at me, but people came out and didn't let them attack me, they started shouting get out of here, what do you want, it's one kid on his own....

As revealed in the above interview extracts, several practices of racism and xenophobia such as anti-refugee protests and night-time racist attacks still occur. Refugees and asylum seekers shared personal experiences of racist violence in Athens, while other interviewees avoided referring to similar incidents, even if they had similar experiences themselves. These practices have been repeatedly reported within the Greek territory, in urban centres, in the islands, as well as in mainland regions where reception facilities operate (RSA, 2018b).

Political engagement

It is not uncommon for refugees who have been living in Greece for years to be politically engaged, in specific contexts that depend on their political or ethnic background. Concrete examples of refugee political organisations or groups have existed in Greece for years, such as that of the Kurdish political refugees. Nevertheless, fewer examples exist regarding the political engagement of newly arrived refugees, mostly due to their precarious situation in terms of waiting for the asylum decision and the inhuman living situation in the reception facilities in Greece. Some relevant examples of political narratives emerged from a small number of interviewees. Following the aforementioned racist practices, many refugees and asylum seekers interviewed narrate perspectives against discrimination, xenophobia and racism. Thanasis – Mah, an Afghan beneficiary of international protection, narrates:

Well it was published a lot in Greece, I did a lot of interviews even in a European level like the Euro News, the New York Times. Well, I was coming

from the camp, from Elefsina. I was changing shift, I was going back to Elefsina to go to Schisto and stay. In the meantime, they stopped me like for motorcycles eight people, they beated me up, some cars that were there left, they called the ambulance, then the police came. [...] I consider them as small children who is just following the orders of the teacher who they work, without thinking why they're doing this, they have no idea. They called themselves Nazis, they had neo-Nazi signs, but they say they were Greek. That's only stupid from them, used the Nazi sign and say they were Greek, what the f***, Nazis belongs to Germany. The same as I said to the local community, if they could think a bit, this refugee population. They don't want to be here so it's not their fault, they forced to be here. What do you expect from them, they can do anything, they have to stay, it's not on their hand. You both have the same goal, so why do you treat them like that? Well, they don't want to be here in this country, that doesn't mean that Greece is bad. Come on, let's live in reality, open your eyes, open your mind, how is the situation. You can see that the refugees are frustrated from the situation and you are more.

A significant number of interviewed asylum seekers mention that they are interested in the political developments, both in their country of origin and in Greece where they reside. They follow the news and express their opinion, usually related to anti-war sentiments. Additionally, some focus on countering discrimination in terms of religion by trying to provide information on Islam, against the dominant narratives of islamophobia emerging in Greece and in Europe. Kingslot for Afghanistan, for example, often tries to speak up about the aforementioned issues, both to locals and to other asylum seekers:

Yes, I read news, always, especially the international news, what's happening in our country, what's happening between Iran and USA, Israel and Iran, Russia, especially about Syria, different kinds of extremist groups. Also, one more thing that I am doing, there are so many people that have a bad image in their mind about Islam, so I try to define Islam, how exactly Islam is. It's not that religion of hate. It's the religion of peace and love. So, I always... I am sort of a scholar, I didn't read but I experienced. I feel like, as a Muslim person, I am representative of Islam. I am, like, I have fate in Islam, I am ambassador of Islam. This is how we have to explain to everyone that what you see in social media is not all that. What you see about ISIS, what you hear about them, they are not Islam. Even Islam is not accepting them. Because it's really typical now, if your name is Mohamed, they say you are a terrorist. I really want to change this point of view. The way the people think about Islam. Because is really, really dangerous for the future, for the upcoming generations. Since we are... our next generation would be here, in Europe. So, I really want to change this. I always give, like, not lecture but a speech to my friends in the house how Islam is and they ask questions. I like when people ask me questions about Islam. I would like to tell them. Not convert them, just inform them and explain the real explanation, not in order to convert, no. Just explain them what Islam is. I always say to my friends, whenever they have questions, they can openly ask me. I don't have any problem. I can start from 400 years ago until now. Whenever they have questions, they always can ask me. I am doing this a lot.

Similar narratives were revealed by Penen, an asylum seeker from Congo living in Lesvos. As he mentioned, he is always aware of what is going on, and he insists on trying to prove the dominant negative discourses on immigration is wrong and on highlighting its advantages.

I went to school, I speak with people, I read the news, I have internet, I must know what is going on. It's like a generation of immigrant want to change the whole idea, because we need to fight all those things that are strange in Europe. Because the speech that are giving the people are wrong. When something happen there is a positive and negative thing. They only talk about the negative side of the things but they don't talk about the positive, we need to make people see that there are also positive things about immigration.

Additionally, as revealed from the following interview extract, refugees react against the way that both the media and the state disseminate the dominant xenophobic discourse against refugees. Many asylum seeker interviewees also insist that the Greek government must find an alternative way to inform the Greek people, so that they can better understand the reasons for which the refugees have fled their countries of origin, their needs and aspirations. As Ermis from Afghanistan narrates:

A great and careful change is needed, the television shows other things, but refugees are different, they are people just like Greeks [...] Instead of listening to the television, the parties who are against immigration and the refugee crisis, or even the church, they should speak to the refugees themselves, go to the camps [...] So that I will not be afraid of you, refugee, I will not see you as a terrorist, you have come from a country where there are bombs and suicide attacks or terrorist attacks. I see you like this because this is what the state and the church and right-wing political parties tell me through the television, or I heard my neighbour tell me this is what you are like – people must see this is not true [...] The Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Immigrant Affairs and the UN, have people speak to refugees. You fear refugees so much, speak, ask questions. Bring an old man, a refugee over 50, bring a young one as well, bring a woman with a headscarf and one without, of course there are, there always have been and there always will. Ask the questions, get the issues out of your head. I, as a refugee, I am free and I am here for anything you want, even on the telephone, on the radio or the television. Call, but show self-respect, don't insult, ask questions. I want to do this, go to big meeting and for people to come, not to attack, say "oh, now the illegal immigrant wants to talk", no, accept him as a refugee of war. You cannot fight against the government or the state or the EU. And Greece cannot do anything, Germany is on you, I know all this, I am not stupid.

Overall, despite the barriers mentioned as regards the civic participation of refugees and asylum seekers, our research reveals that they are active agents, even in the context of the harsh living conditions that characterise their everyday lives. Despite the absence of collective organisation, refugees and asylum seekers often share common perceptions about migration issues, argue against government and EU policies that shape their rights and everyday lives, and are aware of the political situation in the countries they currently reside in. Xenophobia and racism are issues that some of them have encountered as a lived experience, and their voices are imbued with antiracist and anti-war demands.

Conclusions

This report is part of the fifth Work Package of RESPOND (“Multilevel governance of mass migration in Europe and beyond”) and focuses on refugee integration policies, practices and experiences in the period 2011-2019 in Greece. It presents and discusses the legislative measures and policies, the integration practices followed by state and non-state agencies and the experiences of asylum seekers and refugees with regards to integration in Greece.

The increased number of arrivals of refugees in Greece since 2015 have strengthened its character as a transit and a first-reception country. Although during the past years Greece has adopted a number of laws regarding immigrant “regularisation”, it is only recently that a legislative framework on issues of integration has been established. As discussed in the section “Integration Policies: Legal, Political and Institutional Framework”, the Migration and Social Integration Code (Law 4251/2014) is currently the basic law regulating integration in Greece and addresses issues related to residence permits and access to the labour market. Furthermore, two National Strategies for the integration of third-country nationals were launched in 2013 and 2018 respectively, while the HELIOS integration programme is being implemented especially for the integration of beneficiaries of international protection.

In the sections 2-6 we have discussed the main aspects of integration, namely Labour Market, Education, Housing and Spatial Integration, Psychosocial Health and Citizenship, Belonging and Civic Participation. Regarding participating in the labour market, further obstacles were recently put in place through Law 4636/2019, which introduces a six-month time limit before access to the labour market is granted to asylum applicants. Additionally, despite the fact that beneficiaries of international protection (with a residence permit) have access to labour on the same terms and conditions that apply for Greek citizens, they come up against a wide range of obstacles when trying to access the labour market. We have shown that most problems are linked to difficulties in obtaining the necessary administrative documents and requirements (such as Tax Registration Number and Social Security Number (AMKA) or to problems experienced with opening a bank account). Additionally, domestic unemployment and gender inequalities emerge as barriers to accessing the labour market. Employment in the informal labour market, without insurance, with low payments and in precarious conditions, further hinders the access of asylum seekers and refugees to the labour market.

As for education, less than half of asylum seeker, refugee and migrant children are enrolled in formal education in Greece, despite the provisions and obligations stipulated in the relevant legislation. Additionally, despite the recent efforts regarding the implementation of Reception/Preparatory Structures (DYEP) for the education of children, significant shortcomings still exist. There are no specific provisions facilitating the access of refugees to higher education, while formal adult education is only provided in the context of higher education. No formal language-learning programmes are available in the country for adult refugees and asylum seekers, while informal education activities are provided by a wide range of civil society actors in urban settings, as well as inside or near refugee reception facilities. Nevertheless, their fragmentation and ad-hoc character further hinder the integration of asylum seekers and refugees in the field of education.

Concerning housing, Greece never implemented or planned a comprehensive housing policy. The “Emergency Support to Integration and Accommodation programme” (ESTIA),

along with the “Hellenic Integration Support for Beneficiaries of International Protection” (HELIOS) could be considered the only recent examples of a housing policy in Greece in general. The housing/reception system is characterised by the absence of long-term planned solutions, and the relevant policies have been long criticised as inadequate. One of the main problems facing the accommodation of asylum seekers is the spatial isolation of the mainland camps and, more specifically, the long distances between the camps and the closest cities, as well as the lack of frequent and adequate public transportation. The recent ministerial decision referring to the exit of recognised refugees from ESTIA programme, the limited capacity of HELIOS programme and the recent evacuations of squats in central Athens have further limited the integration of asylum seekers and refugees through housing and may lead to increased homelessness.

In terms of access to healthcare provision and to mental health and psychosocial services, already existing serious challenges have been aggravated through recent legislation reforms. Actual access to healthcare services is further complicated due to a number of administrative barriers. It can be argued that all the shortcomings undermine the right to healthcare enshrined in Article 11 of the European Social Charter, in which Greece is a party. Especially in the Hotspots established in the eastern Aegean islands, inadequate access to health care has serious implications for the lives and health of asylum seekers, while vulnerability emerges in-situ even in the case of asylum seekers who didn’t have physical or mental health issues at the time of arrival.

As regards to citizenship, naturalisation procedures remain extremely slow. While no data is provided with regards to the naturalisation of refugees or beneficiaries of international protection, considering the countries of origin of beneficiaries of international protection in Greece, it is reasonable to expect that the percentage of those who acquired citizenship in 2018 was significantly low. The civic engagement of refugees and asylum seekers at the local level, as well as their links to the local communities vary greatly, depending on the spatial and social context and on the facilitation provided either by local institutions or NGOs. Everyday contact with the local population can also range from positive interactions of solidarity to practices of racist violence all over Greece.

Policy Recommendations

- The EU-Turkey Statement must be effectively terminated, as well as the EU “Hotspot Approach”. All policies must be built upon the respect of the right to live in dignity and of the rights of the individual, in accordance with the letter and spirit of human rights law, international humanitarian law and refugee law.
- The geographical restriction on the North-eastern Aegean islands must be lifted. The facilities on the islands should be immediately decongested and asylum seekers should be transferred to the mainland.
- A significant increase in accommodation facilities, both in the mainland and in the North-eastern Aegean islands, is needed, but not in the current form of isolated camps or Hotspots. It is crucial to strengthen the camps with medical and paramedical staff, as well as logistics staff, for the improvement of conditions and services, including medical and psychosocial support and cultural mediation. Shelter must be allocated through gender separation to avoid women being forced to share accommodation with unknown men. Security and lighting in the camps must be reinforced.
- Instead of prolonging accommodation in camps or Hotspots, the capacity of the “Emergency Support to Integration and Accommodation programme - ESTIA” should be urgently strengthened and expanded in order to host a larger number of asylum seekers in Greece’s urban space. Furthermore, the time limit for residing in ESTIA apartments must be extended beyond the recognition of the refugee status.
- The ESTIA programme and the HELIOS integration programme regarding the accommodation of recognised refugees must be linked in order to prevent homelessness. Departure from ESTIA apartments should take place only if and when social integration has been ensured: specifically, the occupational rehabilitation of refugees.
- Education and employment policies have to be expanded so as to enable the transition to self-reliance; crucially, more employability programmes to support asylum seekers and refugees in finding employment must be created.
- All minor asylum seekers should have access to public formal education, and more intercultural public schools must be established. Public-school teachers should be trained for the optimal integration of foreign children into the classroom.
- Free access to legal counselling and representation is particularly important, and on-time legal advice, preferably through personal contact with assigned caseworkers and lawyers, must be provided. Additionally, the assurance that procedural guarantees shall be observed, including access to legal representation and legal aid in decisions surrounding any deprivation of liberty, is crucial.
- An integrated network of adequate services must be put in place in order to ensure the rights of vulnerable refugee groups.
- The provision of a Social Security Number (AMKA) and free medical care for asylum seekers must be urgently reinstated.
- An immediate upgrade of the Reception and Identification Service with sufficient staff

and resources is needed. Additionally, public services, in particular health services, the Manpower Employment Organisation (OAED) and local administration offices, must be staffed with interpreters.

- Last but not least, social and educational programmes against xenophobia and racism must be implemented in schools and workplaces.

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Appendices

Table 1. Micro-level interviewees: Pseudonyms and personal information

Micro-level Interviews							
Pseudo-nyms	Age Group	Civic status	Year of arrival in Greece	Gender	Legal status	Nationality	Point of Arrival in Greece
Kingslot	18-25	Single	2016	M	subsidiary protection	Afghan, Born & Raised in Pakistan	Lesvos
Ahmed	26-35	Married with family	Not Applicable	M	Asylum seeker	Palestinian, Born and lived in Syria	Lesvos
Amin	26-35	Single	2015	M	Asylum seeker	Afghan, Born & Raised in Iran	Kos
Abdul	26-35	Engaged in Afghanistan	2017	M	Asylum seeker	Afghan	Lesvos
Syrian Refugee	18-25	Single	Not Applicable	F	Applicant for Family Reunification	Syrian	Lesvos
Aynla	18-25	Single	2018	M	Subsidiary protection	Somalia	Lesvos
Izzy	18-25	Not Applicable	2008	M	Asylum seeker	Afghan	Lesvos
Jasmid	26-35	In a relationship	2008	M	subsidiary protection	Afghan, Born & Raised in Iran	Lesvos
Libeex	18-25	Single	2018	M	Asylum seeker	Somalia	Lesvos
Michael	26-35	In a relationship	2008	M	Asylum seeker	Sudan	Lesvos

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Mohammad	18-25	Single	2016	M	International Protection	Syrian	Lesvos
Nam & Mohammad	36-45	Married with family	2018	M & F	Asylum seekers	Iraq	Lesvos
Ermis	18-25	Single	2016	M	Applicant for Family Reunification	Afghan, Born & Raised in Iran	Lesvos
Penen	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	2017	M	Asylum seeker	Congo	Lesvos
Ramon	18-25	Single	2016	M	Asylum seeker	Born in Afghanistan, lived in Pakistan & Iran	Chios
Thanasis-Mah	18-25	Single	2016, before the EU-Turkey Deal	M	International Protection	Afghan, Raised in Iran	Chios
Wael	18-25	Single	2015	M	Refugee-Residence permit	Syrian	Lesvos
William	18-25	Single	2018	M	Asylum seeker	Burundi	Lesvos
Willy	18-25	Single	2018	M	Asylum seeker	Cameroon	Lesvos
Arif & Nemen	26-35	Married with 2 children	2017	M & F	Asylum seekers	Kurds from Syria	Kastelorizo & Kos
Mohsin & Lima	18-25	Married with 2 children	2018	M & F	Asylum seekers	Syrians	Alexandroupolis
Medin & Farus	18-25	Married with 2 children	2018	M & F	Asylum seekers	Kurds from Syria	Lesvos
Hafiz & Banek	26-35	Married with 2 children	2018	M & F	Asylum seekers	Kurds from Syria	Alexandroupolis

Anonymus	26-35	Single	2009	M	International Protection	Afghan, Lived some years in Iran	Lesvos
Antoine	26-35	Single	2017	M	Asylum seeker	Guinea	Lesvos
Fatima	18-25	Single	2017	F	Asylum seeker	Afghan, Lived in Pakistan	Lesvos
Faz	18-25	Single	2016	M	Not Applicable	Iran	Lesvos
Jack	18-25	Single	2017	M	Asylum seeker	Iraq	Lesvos
Costas	36-45	Married with family in Russia	2013	M	Asylum seeker	Burundi	Lesvos
Robel	18-25	Single	2017	M	Asylum seeker, applied for 2nd instance	Erithrea	Lesvos
Seralam	26-35	Single	2018	M	Asylum seeker	Afghan	Alexandroupolis
Group Interview		1.2.5. Married with family, 3.4. Married together	Unassigned	1.2.3 .5. M., 4.F	Asylum seekers	1.Afghan, 2.Pakistan, 3.4. Iran, 5. Iraq	Lesvos
Norouh	18-25	Single	Unassigned	M	Asylum seeker	Afghan	Lesvos
Rehma	46-55	Single	2017	M	Asylum seeker	Syrian	Lesvos