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Living in Refugee Camps in Northern Greece

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Abstract

This research concentrates on the phenomenon of massive arrivals of migrants and refugees from different countries in Greece, especially during the acute economic crisis which strikes Greece. The research attempts to analyze how effective the governmental measures are in solving the refugee crisis. Paradoxically, the Greek governments without analogous experience and with limited budgets have tried to confront the growing numbers of migrants and refugees. In 2016, the EU's decision to close the borders in northern Greece deteriorated the problem. Although the wave of solidarity, which mainly consists of the state apparatus, the NGOs and the individual initiative, is obvious and helpful, it cannot either change significantly the harsh everyday life in the camps or stop the new irregular arrivals. The data of the research is mainly derived from employees who work in refugee camps in northern Greece as well as from relevant literature. The research analyzes the phenomenon of living in refugee camps in Greece in order to supply the appropriate answers for the broader illegal and irregular immigration in Europe.

Keywords: Migration, Refugees, Migrants, Asylum, Camps.

Introduction

Following the collapse of the Iron Curtain the population of foreigners has significantly increased in Greece. Globalization (e.g. easy transportation) and EU's soft borders policy (e.g. no special border controls) played a key role in this rise.

Table 1. Population of Greece

| | 1991 | 2001 | 2011 |
|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Total | 10,259,900 | 10,934,097 | 10,816,286 |
| Indigenous | 10,092,624 | 10,171,906 | 9,904,286 |
| Foreigners | 167,276 | 762,191 | 912,000 |
| Total % | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| Indigenous | 98.4 | 93.0 | 91.6 |
| Foreigners | 1.6 | 7.0 | 8.4 |

Source: Hellenic Statistical Authority

Apart from the increased presence of foreigners, Greece has faced irregular migration arrivals since 2011. 2011 was a crossroad. Greece was trying to confront two major problems: the local economic crisis due to previous high debts and the massive migration due to the Arab Spring. Unfortunately, the long lasting wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria deteriorated the problems of migration.

Table 2. Greece: General Government debt to GDP ratio, 2008-2016

| Year | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 |
|----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Debt b.€ | 264.7 | 301.0 | 330.5 | 356.2 | 305.0 | 320.5 | 319.7 | 311.6 | 314.8 |
| GDP b.€ | 241.9 | 237.5 | 225.5 | 206.9 | 191.1 | 180.6 | 177.9 | 175.6 | 175.8 |

Source: Eurostat, in Mavridis 2018:4

The Greek economic crisis affected Greece's reaction to massive migration arrivals because it could not afford the additional economic burden. Furthermore, the newcomers either immigrants or refugees wanted to go to the richer central Europe. In 2015 the problem of massive irregular migration could not be hidden. The European migrant crisis found EU unprepared. According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) "over a million refugees and migrants have reached Europe by dangerously crossing the Mediterranean Sea", nearly half of them from Syria. The migrant crisis was considered as Europe's worst since World War II (Press Trust of India 2015). According to IOM's Missing Migrants Project (<http://missingmigrants.iom.int/>) the total deaths recorded in the Mediterranean in 2014 reached 3,261 persons and in 2015, 3,783 persons! What is worse, apart from the increased death toll, is the high number of persons regarded missing.

On May 2015 EU adopted the European Agenda on Migration which focused on security in the EU member states. The European Agenda on Migration gave priority to intensive border controls and fighting against smuggling neglecting the enforcement of the refugees' fundamental human rights. For the first time, the European Migration Agenda included common policies to address the huge problem of migration. The key measures were six (Carrera et al. 2015:2):

1. An emergency relocation of asylum seekers was introduced. Between July and September 2015 160,000 asylum seekers were relocated from Greece and Italy. The relocation

system was based on criteria such as GDP, unemployment rate, and the population of asylum seeking applicants.

2. A relocation of 20,000 asylum seekers to non-EU states along with a 50 million Euro budget
3. An upgrade in Frontex's role in order to enhance border controls in the Mediterranean Sea.
4. The EU's decision to financially support the concerned EU member states with €60 million. Also, EU introduced the "New Hotspots" approach by which Frontex, Europol and the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) are responsible for supporting the registration and first interview process of the refugees in five Greek islands, namely Lesbos, Chios, Leros, Samos, and Kos.
5. The EU's enhancement of controls in the Mediterranean Sea with the help of CEPOL in order to combat migrant smuggling.
6. The implementation of an EU Common Security and Defense Policy Operation in the Mediterranean Sea to deal with trafficking networks and smugglers.

After the initial shock, the great powers (USA, EU, NATO, FRONTEX) decided to take action against illegal human trafficking of migrants and refugees. According to the UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime): "There is evidence that, at a minimum, 2.5 million migrants were smuggled for an economic return of US\$ 5.5-7 billion in 2016. This is equivalent to what the United States of America (some US\$7 billion) or the European Union countries (some US\$6 billion) spent on humanitarian aid globally in 2016" (UNODC, 2018:5).

On 7th March 2016 EU decided to close the Balkan corridor (the Western Balkan route) for the immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers. In addition, on 11th March 2016 NATO initiated patrols with warships in the Aegean Sea to confront "human trafficking and criminal networks" (BBC News 2016). Furthermore, the EU-Turkey agreement of 20th March 2016, which is both a safe third country readmission agreement and a resettlement agreement, led to the obvious reduction of the mass influx of irregular migrants and refugees trying to enter the European Union, especially through Turkey. "Under the deal, Turkey would take back migrants arriving to Greece who do not apply for asylum or whose claims are rejected" (Šabić, 2017:3). The basic principles of the EU-Turkey agreement defined that all new irregular migrants going from Turkey to the Greek islands as of 20th March 2016 will be returned to Turkey. Turkey at that time had already hosted more than 3 million Syrians refugees. In return, for every Syrian being transferred to Turkey from the Greek islands, another Syrian is moved to the EU. Finally, the EU committed to give 3 billion € to Turkey in order to welcome and render hospitality to refugees. In 2018 a new deal between Turkey and the EU was made by which the EU promised to give additional financial aid to Turkey (Reuters, 2018). Thus, Turkey became de facto a "safe third country" (Gkliati, 2017).

In 2016, as a result of the international anti-immigration measures, at least 46,000 persons without proper visa documents were entrapped in Greece seeking either for asylum or job. In 2016 Greece's 31 official facilities could only render hospitality to a maximum of 33,640 persons. Unfortunately some of them had to live in harsh conditions. At the same time the Visegrád Group

(Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia), all member states of the EU, tried to promote more border controls for all migrants and almost all refugees.

Definitions

Theoretically, refugee status is clarified by the 1951 Refugee Convention and the additional 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees which removed the geographic and temporal limits of the 1951 Convention. The additional Protocol was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly with Resolution 2198 (XXI). Since 2013 146 states have signed the 1951 Convention and 145 the additional 1967 Protocol. According to the 1967 Protocol a refugee is a person who “owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it” (article 1 A 2).

All displaced people have the right to seek for asylum. If they make it, they are officially regarded as refugees. The displaced people as well as immigrants who have applied for asylum are regarded as asylum seekers until their application is examined. The third category of economic immigrants or migrants includes all persons who want to travel and work abroad but do not have the legal or proper documents. There are small differences among migration, immigration, and emigration based on EC Regulation No 862/2007 on Migration and International Protection. According to the UN a migrant can be “someone who changes their country of usual residence for a period of at least a year, so that the country of destination effectively becomes the country of usual residence” (Sturge, 2018: 4). The International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, adopted by General Assembly resolution 45/158 of 18th December 1990, says in article 2 (1) “The term ‘migrant worker’ refers to a person who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a State of which he or she is not a national”. So according to international law there are refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. Of course, there is a significant difference between migrants and asylum seekers. “A migrant is someone who changes their country of usual residence. An asylum seeker is someone who does so ‘from fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, social group, or political opinion’” (Sturge, 2018:6).

The problem of Overcrowding in Greek refugee Camps

The anti-immigration measures of the EU and the NATO have led to a significant reduction of non-EU immigration. Key role to this reduction played the closed borders policy of the EU (Tables 3 and 4).

Table 3. Number of arriving migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Europe (2015-2017)

| Year | Persons |
|------|-----------------------------|
| 2015 | 1,000,000 |
| 2016 | 364,000 |
| 2017 | 105,000 (in the first half) |

Source: Press Trust of India 2015, Aljazeera.com 2017, UNHCR – The UN Refugee Agency

Table 4. Total deaths recorded in the Mediterranean Sea (2014-7/8/2018)

| Year | Persons |
|------|---------|
| 2014 | 3,261 |
| 2015 | 3,783 |
| 2016 | 5,143 |
| 2017 | 3,139 |
| 2018 | 1,514 |

Source: IOM’s Missing Migrants Project - <http://missingmigrants.iom.int/>

Both table 3 and 4 show an important reduction in the immigration flows towards Europe. At the same time the total number of deaths of migrants and refugees who did not manage to travel towards Europe was reduced. According to the official page of UNHCR: “In the first half of 2017, over 105,000 refugees and migrants entered Europe” (UNHCR). In total, in 2017 Spain, Italy and Greece received again the lion’s share, namely at least 177,436 migrants, and refugees. Spain received 28,349 persons (22,100 by sea and 6,246 by land), Italy 119,369 persons (by sea) and Greece 29,718 persons (by sea) (UNHCR, 2018). Surely there are persons who travelled to Italy and Greece by land who might not have been counted. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) “slightly fewer than half as many migrants reached Europe by sea in 2017 than 2016” (Nebhay, 2018).

On the other hand, while the total number of new migrants and refugees in Europe was reduced, in Greece the situation was different (Tables 5 and 6).

Table 5. Number of asylum seeking applications in Greece (7/6/2013-30/06/2018)

| | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | Total |
|-------|-------|-------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------|
| Total | 4,813 | 9,431 | 13,188 | 51,054 | 58,643 | 30,192 | 167,322 |

Source: Ministry for Migration Policy (5/7/2018)

In 2015 in Greece the number of asylum seekers was not very high because the majority of incomers were free to move to other European countries illegally crossing the border either through the Republic of Macedonia or via the western Balkan corridor (Greek Ombudsman 2017:26-27).

Table 6. Number of asylum seeking applications (change % 7/6/2013-30/06/2018)

| | |
|-----------|----------|
| 2013-2014 | 14.3% ↑ |
| 2014-2015 | 39.8% ↑ |
| 2015-2016 | 287.1% ↑ |
| 2016-2017 | 14.9% ↑ |
| 2017-2018 | 3.0 % ↑ |

Source: Ministry for Migration Policy (5/7/2018)

Tables 5 and 6 show that in Greece there is an increase in asylum seeking applications from 2013 to 2018. Although Greece has taken numerous measures against illegal trafficking of migrants, in compliance with the EU and the NATO, more and more migrants and refugees arrive either by sea or by land, even in 2018. The number of asylum seeking applications is relevant to the number of new arrivals of migrants and refugees. For example “in the first three months of 2018, arrivals to Italy remained significantly lower than in the first three months of 2017 (a 74% decrease), those to Greece increased by 33% compared to last year, while arrivals to Spain increased by 13%” (UNHCR, 2018:4).

Unfortunately, after the closure of the Western Balkan route in 2016 many people were forced to remain in Greek refugee camps, mainly in some of the Greek islands of the Aegean Sea as well as in other areas of the Greek mainland. The new arrivals of migrants and refugees deteriorated the previous status quo. Greece was unprepared to receive enormous masses of migrants and refugees. All these people simply wanted to migrate via Greece to rich Western European countries and they were unwillingly entrapped in Greece primarily due to the European closing of the borders in March 2016. In July 2018 the entrapped refugees in the Greek “hotspots” (camps for refugees and migrants) of the Aegean Islands (such as Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Leros, Kos) exceeded 17,000 persons while these facilities can accommodate only about half of them. In May 2018 the entrapped of the Aegean Islands were 16,769 persons. Table 7 shows the problem of overcrowding in Greek refugee camps in the most important hotspots of the Greek islands of the Aegean Sea.

Table 7. Refugee Camps in the hotspots of the Aegean Sea (21/5/2018)

| Camps | Capacity | People on site |
|----------------|----------|----------------|
| Lesvos (Moria) | 3,000 | 7,370 |
| Samos | 648 | 2,915 |
| Chios (VIAL) | 1,014 | 1,616 |
| Leros | 860 | 823 |
| Kos | 815 | 856 |

Source: Elafros 2018

On 27th July 2018 Asylum Information Database (Aida 2018) counted 33 Temporary Accommodation Centers in the Greek mainland which accommodate 14,281 persons. Of course, there are additional camps in many Greek islands such as hotspots of the Aegean Sea (Table 7). In August 2018 the Greek Army alone manages 31 camps for refugees and migrants which accommodate 29,339 persons in overcrowded facilities (Kathimerini 10/8/2018). Apart from the refugee camps for which the Greek Army is responsible, there are also additional facilities for

refugees such as informal camps, on-hold sites, other state-run facilities (e.g. municipal structures), NGO camps, UNHCR facilities, private hotels for refugees, etc.

In June 2018, according to UNHCR (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) the total number of refugees and people seeking asylum in Greece was 58,000 (Kathimerini, 20/6/2018). Since 2016 the situation has deteriorated because at that time the entrapped were approximately 46,000. What is worse, from 20th March 2016 to 12th December 2016 only 777 foreigners returned to Turkey because of the EU-Turkey migration agreement signed on 20th March 2016 (General Secretariat for Media and Communication of the Hellenic Republic, 2017:12). Furthermore, apart from Greek sea borders, many refugees come to Greece via Evros, the Greek land border with Turkey. As of 8th July 2018, a rise by 122% was recorded in migration flows through the land border of Evros in relation to 2017 (Kathimerini 22/07/2018). “More than 10,000 refugees and migrants have crossed into Greece illegally through the Greece-Turkey border at Evros in the first half of 2018, with Doctors Without Borders (MSF) sending extra staff to meet their medical needs. So far the number of migrant arrivals has already surpassed that of the total number for 2017, with the lack of proper infrastructure in the area causing problems to both locals and migrants” (Chrysopoulos, 2018).

Table 8. Asylum applications (non-EU) in the EU-28 Member States, 2008–2017

| Year | Asylum applications (non-EU) in the EU-28 Member States, 2008-2017 |
|------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2008 | 225,200 |
| 2009 | 263,800 |
| 2010 | 259,400 |
| 2011 | 309,000 |
| 2012 | 335,300 |
| 2013 | 431,100 |
| 2014 | 627,000 |
| 2015 | 1,322,800 |
| 2016 | 1,260,900 |
| 2017 | 704,600 |

Source: Eurostat (Asylum statistics)

Table 8 shows a strange phenomenon. The asylum applications in Europe have reduced since 2016. On the other hand, in Greece, the number of asylum applications has increased since 2016 (see Table 6). In reality, EU has solved the immigration problem at a certain degree by scarifying Spain, Italy and especially Greece. “Overall, on the Western Balkan route, the number of illegal border-crossings by non-regional migrants at and between border-crossing points (BCPs) decreased in 2017 to roughly 19,000 (down from over 260,000 in 2016). The decreasing trend observed during the last nine months in 2016 was mirrored in 2017. Each quarter in 2017 saw lower figures as the migratory pressure remained relatively stable and returned to manageable levels. The closure of the Western Balkans transit corridor in Q1 2016 was a crucial step towards tackling the migration crisis and bringing the pressure down to manageable levels” (FRONTEX, 2018:5).

The problem of the demographic breakdown and the diverse cultural background of migrants and refugees

The countries that receive migrants and refugees face a variety of problems due to lack of facilities and resources. What is more, an innovative plan of adaptation of migrants in the new societies is needed in order to avoid discrimination, the creation of ghettos, the rise in criminality and extremism. Apart from visible difficulties, Greece provides free medical assistance, free food supply, and free accommodation. Furthermore, all children from refugee families have the right to attend Greek schools such as primary and secondary level schools.

Apart from the above mentioned overcrowding issue in Greek refugee camps, two more problems have come to surface. The first is the demographic breakdown and the second the diverse cultural background of migrants and refugees (e.g. language and religion).

Table 9. Sex and age of asylum seeking applicants in Greece (7/6/2013-30/06/2018)

| Age | Men | Women | Total |
|---------|---------|--------|---------|
| 0-13 | 20,758 | 18,603 | 39,361 |
| 14-17 | 11,135 | 3,278 | 14,413 |
| 18-34 | 61,837 | 20,830 | 82,667 |
| 35-64 | 19,493 | 10,595 | 30,088 |
| 65 plus | 346 | 447 | 793 |
| Total | 113,569 | 53,753 | 167,322 |

Source: Ministry for Migration Policy (5/7/2018)

According to Table 9, the large majority of asylum seekers are young people. Surely young people are more eager to take risks and to migrate. The basic problem is that the number of men is more than twice the number of women. This growing imbalance brings about an obvious demographic breakdown.

Table 10. Unaccompanied minors (7/6/2013-30/06/2018)

| Males | Females | Total |
|-------|---------|-------|
| 5,871 | 621 | 6,422 |

Source: Ministry for Migration Policy (5/7/2018)

Table 10 shows that unaccompanied children who are male obviously outweigh the female population. Unaccompanied minors need constant and special care. Only in 2017, the accommodation requests to EKKA (National Center for Social Solidarity) for Unaccompanied Children were 5,527 (Table 11).

Table 11. Accommodation requests to EKKA in 2017

| Category of Applicant | Requests | Persons | Persons Accepted | Acceptance Rate |
|------------------------|--------------|---------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Single Adult | 1,737 | 1,737 | 186 | 10.7% |
| Family | 786 | 3,219 | 584 | 18.1% |
| Single-parent Family | 591 | 1,701 | 827 | 48.6% |
| Unaccompanied Children | 5,527 | 5,527 | 2,689 | 48.6% |
| Total | 8,461 | 12,184 | 4,286 | 35.2% |

Source: EKKA in Aida (27/07/2018)

Another underestimated problem is the diverse cultural background of migrants and refugees. According to Table 12 the applicants who sought asylum in Greece had come from countries with completely different cultural backgrounds such as Syria, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iraq. What is worse, the West and especially the EU and the NATO spend billions of Euros for regulating migration policy without investigating the deeper causes of massive immigration.

Table 12. Applicants' countries of origin (7/6/2013-30/06/2018)

| Country | Total | % |
|-----------------|----------------|---------------|
| Syria | 56,094 | 33.5% |
| Pakistan | 21,243 | 12.7% |
| Afghanistan | 19,814 | 11.8% |
| Iraq | 18,818 | 11.2% |
| Albania | 7,468 | 4.5% |
| Bangladesh | 4,893 | 2.9% |
| Iran | 3,846 | 2.3% |
| Georgia | 3,468 | 2.1% |
| Turkey | 3,268 | 2.0% |
| Palestine | 2,822 | 1.7% |
| Other countries | 25,588 | 15.3% |
| Total | 167,322 | 100.0% |

Source: Ministry for Migration Policy (5/7/2018)

Table 12 shows that the large majority of migrants and refugees who seek asylum in Greece comes from Muslim countries where Western organizations and states have significantly intervened in the past. The Western intervention (see NATO) was military, economic and political but the results were fruitless. Inevitably, prevention is better than cure not only in health issues but also in International Relations. According to the Greek Ombudsman (2017:14-15) asylum seekers come mostly from Syria and Afghanistan (Greek Ombudsman 2017:14-15).

Survey on Living Conditions in Refugee Camps of Northern Greece

The reason for this study lies on the fact that there is no official information from governmental institutions evaluating the impact of refugee camps on Greece. The research attempted to analyze how effective the governmental measures were in resolving the refugee crisis.

General Information on the Living Conditions of Asylum Seekers in Northern Greece

Until February 2016 the Greek government did nothing to seriously deal with the situation of asylum seekers. With some exceptions, in the time period between October 2015 and February 2016 Greece was only a transit passage to rich northern European countries. As mentioned earlier the borders of northern Greece gradually and steadily closed after March 2016. The fact that many asylum seekers were forced to stay in Greece forced the Greek government to take serious measures to accommodate refugees and migrants. Unfortunately, until the beginning of 2017 this goal had not been achieved. The lack of basic infrastructure had had tragic consequences, especially during winter 2016-2017 due to the visible lack of organization and coordination (Greek Ombudsman 2017:40-41).

Methodology of the Survey

This research is based on qualitative data from northern Greece between June and August 2018. Northern Greece was selected because since 20th March 2016 positive changes have taken place in the asylum seekers' situation. Out of our respect for their ethical values, the interviewees were completely informed of the scope and the contents of this research. All data were provided from fourteen camp employees such as social workers, nurses, rescuers, doctors and civil servants, registered anonymously and remains confidential. The work experience in camps for most of them varied from eighteen months to two and a half years. The interviews were tape recorded with the interviewees' consent and written down if they refused to be tape recorded. The methodology used was based on six categories - living and eating conditions, hygiene and health, obstacles in everyday life, positive steps to overcome them, inability to cope with the situation and suggestions. The qualitative results were supported by relevant literature.

The Profile of Asylum Seekers

According to the respondents, the countries of origin of asylum seekers were Syria, Northern Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and North Africa while asylum seekers of Turkish descent have drastically increased since the last coup attempt in Turkey (July 2016). The majority of them are Muslims while some of them identify themselves as Yazidis. In terms of their education level, the employees at the camps mentioned that most asylum seekers are primary or secondary education graduates, an element which is also confirmed in Patiraki (2018a and 2018b). However, it should be noted that asylum seekers from Syria have a better educational level than the others.

As to family status, mostly observed are families with children, single parents, single men, and unaccompanied children. On the other hand most asylum seekers' financial situation cannot be estimated. The personnel of the camps suggested that the asylum seekers' sole income is most likely what they receive from the UNHCR prepaid card.

The ultimate goal of all asylum seekers was to obtain political asylum. Acceptance or rejection procedures in Greece are unfortunately quite long, thus, delaying the accomplishment of their desire to travel to the rich countries of Europe. For now, the first appointment is scheduled for the summer of 2020. Respondents estimated that this process could last from one to two years. Inside the camps, the people who eventually managed to obtain political asylum have been few.

Asylum procedures for those originally coming from Syria or Northern Iraq usually take a shorter period of time to be completed. What is most important is that no one knows what will

happen if an asylum seeker fails to acquire refugee protection status. Concerning whether there are asylum seekers who wish to return home voluntarily through the resettlement program, the respondents firmly suggested that there is none.

Living Conditions in Camps

According to the information obtained by the respondents, the camps are divided into those of the islands and those of the mainland. Unfortunately, the transit camps initially used for first asylum seekers' settlements until they would settle in UNHCR's apartments have gradually reopened. That's where non-registered asylum seekers live most of the times.

Housing conditions in camps of northern Greece are decent in the case of prefabs (containers) or autonomous apartments appropriately renovated (old campsites, former centers for children and orphans). A basic facility is about 60m² with separate toilet, kitchen, air-conditioning, and solar water heater. There are cases where two families live and share one prefab or only single families or single men. In the camp of Fylakio there are containers with a 60-people capacity of with shared toilet, kitchen, and showers.

Moreover, the camp personnel tries to organize the stay at the camps by accommodating the people according to their family and personal status in order to avoid crises. A respondent stated:

The structure where I work receives referrals based on the vulnerability of the populations. There are mostly families with children and few who are alone.

The overconcentration of asylum seekers and the overcrowded camp areas are typical problems as reported by a respondent:

Initially, 2,000 refugees had to be accommodated in very poor conditions under canopies without any provision on hygiene and safety rules. By this spring this changed radically. The asylum seekers now live in a container (prefab) with two rooms, a toilet, and air-conditioning for heating in the winter and cooling in the summer. The shared spaces were in very good condition. However, that changed in the spring of 2018. Since after that period, 1,000 additional asylum seekers arrived and occupied the shared spaces. This situation creates a need for swift decisions.

According to Kalpouzou and Mann (2015:5-6), in the region of Evros, 146 asylum seekers were housed in a space of 100m² trapped in particularly bad conditions.

Regarding the time spent in camps, those seeking political asylum stay there for two years. The only difference is that in the First Reception Center (Fylakio, Evros) they stay only for a short time. They are directly sent to camps in the mainland within a period of no more than two months.

Regarding the question of whether the hosting centers are staffed with interpreters most of the answers are positive. Certain doubts are expressed however whether the number of interpreters is sufficient given the fact that they usually know Arabic and Persian but not the other languages of the incomers. Often in some camps there may be no interpreters for up to four months because of delays in their re-engagement.

Concerning food supply, the army uses catering services and NGOs use either catering services or "kitchens for all". The state apparatus was incapable of providing even basic food services because it did not have the appropriate infrastructure and resources (Greek Ombudsman 2017:46-48). The before-mentioned status quo remained untouched until 2016. Now the use of catering services in the camps is left to the asylum seekers since they have some

money in their UNHCR prepaid cards. Only in the First Reception Centers asylum seekers are still catered for. Complaints about the quality of the food are not mentioned. Moreover, drinking water is abundant in every city's network.

Daily hygiene and clean clothing and bedclothes are ensured in the majority of structures.

This also has a logic. When asylum seekers arrive, they are very exhausted and this is depicted in their clothes and their personal hygiene. Therefore, at the first moment individuals have to take care of themselves and clean the container and their personal belongings in common spaces.

The spaces are shared between the residents of the camps and specific timetables are given concerning the availability of washing machines.

Health Care

Health care in camps is very important especially when asylum seekers live together and share common spaces. A negative fact mentioned by a respondent is that Doctors Without Frontiers have gradually left from the camps:

The camps are staffed with doctors and nurses. Doctors Without Frontiers are gradually withdrawing from all structures since May 2018 because the risk for Greece is no longer urgent. KEELPNO (Center for Control and Prevention of Diseases) is gradually taking over which has neither the experience of Doctors Without Frontiers nor the ability to deal with problems and difficulties so effectively. (...). There is also a great shortage in the psychiatric specialty. There are many incidents and the need for immediate treatment is acute.

In addition, check-ups for pregnant women or people suffering from chronic diseases are provided at Hospitals or Health Centers. Moreover, there is respective care for infants and children. The children are vaccinated at the camp by the staff of KEELPNO. In a recent study (Mellou et al. 2017) it is confirmed that children 1-14 years old are more vulnerable to Hepatitis A than the others. Overcrowding hosting areas and poor personal hygiene are regarded as the main reasons for infections. The risk of hepatitis A is owed to the overcrowded spaces. Also, special care is available for sexually transmitted diseases because many of the residents are not aware of preventive methods.

In many camps applicants are required to find doctors of the specialty they need on their own and book appointments themselves at hospitals if they have an AMKA (social security number). Of course, many doctors refuse to examine them if they are not accompanied by an interpreter. A respondent says:

We also need medical staff which should be specialized. There are other issues like professional behavior to take care of but firstly we need specialized staff.

In all refugee camps, water, sanitation and hygiene interventions aim at covering basic needs and improving safe access to clean and abundant water resources (see <http://donors.unhcr.gr/echo/el>).

The Everyday life in Camps

The Greek state until 2016 failed to provide asylum seekers with adequate accommodation according to both EU and national law. Consequently, much information about inhuman

treatment is confirmed (Greek Ombudsman 2017:39). Respondents described the everyday life and the psychology of asylum seekers in Greece as bad:

The asylum seekers know that they will stay permanently in Greece and their attitude is very negative. So they do not want to chase opportunities. All they care about is to get to Europe. There is a camp where single men are gathered to get away illegally to Albania and then to Europe.

However, the psychological situation of the children differs and, according to respondents' sayings, affects the attitude of their parents.

Regarding the psychological situation of parents their children's situation plays an important role. However, children often engage in aggression or display an inability to adapt to the environment. In any case, living in a camp is not normality. However efforts are being made.

The availability of the applicants is positively influenced by the fact that they communicate with relatives or friends who live in their country of origin or abroad through Skype and Facebook or mobile phones. Moreover, the expectation to meet family members abroad (to reconnect with family members living abroad) is a stimulus as they state, but they must follow specific procedures in order for their transition to be approved.

Also, another factor contributing significantly to improving their psychological condition is related to their ability to work in campsites and to fill up their free time. Asylum seekers should be motivated to have goals and aspirations.

Courses take place but especially for children in special zones in afternoon schools while adults are taught Greek, English, and German.

It appears from the answers given that the prepaid cards granted to asylum seekers greatly improved their psychological state.

It is a great advantage that this financial help exists. (...) They have the money to get what they want; they spend time on cooking, going to the market and investing in the local community by making use of their time in a creative way. (...). Being permanently in a passive state in which someone else cares for your food through catering, for your clothes, your child, since they give you everything, causes a path of dependence that creates a pathogenic psychological condition.

The prepaid cards are funded by EU humanitarian aid, the UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency and donors to the Greek Operation. Moreover, help is provided by the International Rescue Committee (IRC), the International Federation of Red Cross (IFRC), Mercy Corps, Samaritan's Purse, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) (see <http://donors.unhcr.gr/echo/el>). On 10/06/2016 the UN Refugee Agency requested financial aid for Greece with a targeted amount of 300.4 million Euros and eventually received 184.5 million. The donors were the EU, the United Kingdom, Germany, Austria, Norway, the Foundation BNP Paribas, the Greek Church, the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, the Vodafone Foundation, and the International Olympic Committee.

Reasons for Protests

Living in tents and prefabs (containers) in isolated camps with restrictions of movement and without the same rights as the native people may cause tensions. EU measures made asylum seekers feel socially marginalized. The incomers expressed complaints about the lack of information and legal assistance (Farhat et al. 2018). The situation is even worse on the Greek islands where large numbers of asylum seekers have arrived. Lack of spaces causes problems as

well. Also, the EU should do more to protect asylum seekers from sexual violence by providing security, and medical, psychological and social support (Freedman 2016).

In the camps, due to the high number of unregistered people, many conflicts take place on a racial basis. There is also the phenomenon of some races taking up leading role within specific camps so they do not want other unregistered people to enter and settle. Registered asylum seekers do not want unregistered people to enter because living conditions for them become worse.

Another factor that raises concern in camps is the delay in the processing of the applicants' requests and the excessive bureaucracy due to poor public administration.

Bureaucracy is also an inhibiting factor in the integration process of asylum seekers. The programs today aim at integration.

The fact that asylum seekers expect better living conditions by abandoning the islands and the frustration they experience when they discover that the situation is different but not as expected on the mainland has the effect of inappropriate behavior.

They expect better conditions and yet they face the same problems or worse as a result of frustration.

According to the statements of the majority of respondents, separation based on origin and vulnerability largely discourages such behaviors.

There are frictions and that's why we are trying in Fylakio but I think also in the rest of the mainland to separate the applicants by race and vulnerability. However, extreme behaviors sometimes occur where we try to intervene.

The situation has been described as out of control for non-enrolled entering the country. According to Kalpouzou and Mann (2015:26), the threat of unauthorized immigration generates inhuman and degrading treatment that can easily be accepted as a way to protect the state.

There is a concentration of unregistered applicants in antiauthoritarian communities that occupy buildings. NGOs cannot help since the antiauthoritarians do not trust them because they believe NGOs cooperate with the state. These entrants cannot, unfortunately, be recorded and they face allegations for committing black market offenses and smuggling.

Care for Unaccompanied Minors

The degree of vulnerability is taken into account wherever it is possible in order to avoid inappropriate or unlawful behavior at the expense of the unaccompanied minors and other vulnerable asylum seekers.

Unaccompanied children reside in a separate room (...). Sometimes the children behave according to their strong desire to get to Europe, not necessarily legitimately. As a result, they are exploited by traffickers and so there are phenomena of trafficking of children in the big cities. At the First Reception Center in Fylakio a respondent mentions:

We are having problems with the flows of unaccompanied children. They have also increased in numbers and unfortunately children are not immediately relocated to the mainland where there is specific space for them. Nowadays, they have to wait for four to five months to be relocated to an appropriate place.

Cooperation with the State Apparatus

The lack of central planning in association with the failure to properly use European and domestic resources have been the main causes of the inability to tackle the immigration problem until the end of 2016 (Greek Ombudsman 2017:39). Moreover, dispersal of responsibilities between different Ministries resulted in low effectiveness (Greek Ombudsman 2017:19).

There are too many areas that should be improved. An advantage of NGOs is that we are more flexible. I wish we had the ability of the state to intervene combined with the flexibility of NGOs. For me now it is not an asylum seekers' crisis. It has become daily normality. Since funding has been transferred directly from the EU to the Greek state, the state has to take up the responsibility for proper management of the situation.

Unfortunately, both the state and some NGOs have shown delays, lack of organization as well as reluctance for long-term planning. As a result, the interventions do not have the expected effectiveness. Even senior officials create unjustifiable obstacles in managing the situation.

Moreover, the asylum seekers face difficulties when they enter into the Center of Citizen Service (KEP) in order to examine submitted applications. Also, many times when they apply in a Disability Identification Center they are confronted inappropriately. What is worse in primary schools many principals refuse to accept children by using lack of vaccination as an excuse.

Positive Steps for Asylum Seekers

There is no doubt that positive steps in the management of the refugee issue have been made according to the respondents. For example, since February 2018 all asylum seekers were able to register in the Greek unemployment agency (OAED). Also, asylum seekers registered in the Greek social insurance agency and receive AMKA (Social Security number) have the right to get medical support in hospitals or medical centers. The right to care is also given to those who are not registered but in this case bureaucracy creates many obstacles for them to undergo medical examination.

It is also possible for children to attend school. These children make great progress in language and social skills. In addition, a very positive development is that about 89% of asylum seekers participate in Greek language learning programs.

All respondents agree that it is important for asylum seekers to be active, to participate in actions or work. They could overcome problems and reorganize their life this way. There are many who try to socialize and take part in various events such as visits to museums or excursions. Even visits from lawyers are scheduled who inform asylum seekers about their rights. This shows that the situation has significantly improved since 2015 and onwards.

Trying to Overcome Difficulties

One factor that definitely restricts asylum seekers is the delay in getting an appointment for their first interview. Some of them refuse to be part of society. But even though some asylum seekers try to find a job, as a result, many employers take advantage of them and let them work in inhuman conditions. Also it is very negative that there are not many activities for adults except for the language courses. The right to work is only guaranteed for refugees. For asylum seekers, it is not clear what they are allowed to do or not. As a respondent mentions:

Now we are talking about the crisis but crisis becomes regularity. These populations come to stay (...). Therefore, the state should adapt. Otherwise huge negative reactions are created.

Among us, at conferences, we often use the term inclusion. My personal opinion is that we should talk in terms of incorporation. In fact, it is a necessity because the numbers of asylum seekers are extremely large for Greece.

The respondents complained about the lack of a stable framework. The state plans only in the short term. The NGOs receive small financial aid and so they can plan only up to annual projects. A plan of duration of two and a half years is considered to be an enormous success. It is often said that the state should be flexible and effective. Unfortunately state inflexibility negatively affects the living conditions of asylum seekers. For example, in some structures, asylum seekers have no full medical coverage for drugs. They have to pay a part of the cost themselves, between 10 and 25%. Finally, many times they do not have money for transport..

Suggestions for Improvement

First of all, a common belief among respondents is that the delay in registrations, asylum granting or return to the countries of origin should be reduced. Moreover, asylum seekers have to be more encouraged, active and empowered to participate in community life. Inclusion in society and interconnection with potential employers will improve their integration. The necessity for specialized staff such as translators, psychologists, psychiatrists, etc is expressed by the majority of respondents. Medical coverage for all asylum seekers should also be provided. Finally, a social worker proposed that accommodation could be better in apartments rather than camps. This could help them be normally integrated into society as well as in everyday life.

The Future

The future of foreign immigration in Greece is ominous. In July 2017 the European Court of Justice “ruled that the EU’s Dublin regulations, under which refugees must seek asylum in the first member state they enter, still apply despite the unprecedented influx of 2015” (Huggler 2017). This means that the Dublin III Regulation has officially transformed the Mediterranean states of the EU, such as Malta, Italy, Greece, and Spain, into an enormous trap for migrants and refugees. Furthermore, Table 13 shows that many refugees and migrants have been entrapped in Greece. At first, the Readmission Agreements with supposedly Safe Third Countries such as Turkey did not succeed. Readmission is the process through which individuals (e.g., unauthorized migrants, rejected asylum-seekers and stateless persons) are removed from the territory of a country, whether in a coercive manner or not. Readmission has become part and parcel of the immigration control systems consolidated by countries of origin, transit, and destination. Technically, it requires cooperation at the bilateral level with the foreign country to which the readmitted or removed persons are to be relocated for readmission cannot be performed without prior agreement to cooperate and to deliver travel documents or *laissez-passeurs* (Caron 2017:28). Secondly, the EU Resettlement Program failed because it's usually based on voluntary background. Resettlement “means the process whereby, on a request from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (‘UNHCR’) based on a person’s need for international protection, third-country nationals are transferred from a third country and established in a Member State” (art. 2a of Regulation (EU) No 516/2014). “The implementation of the relocation plan did not meet the goal in the initially planned two-year period, from September 2015. A total of 29,401 refugees were relocated by 27 September 2017. There are different reasons for this,

but they can generally be grouped into two major categories, namely technical obstacles and perception obstacles” (Šabić 2017:9).

Table 13. Asylum Decisions of First Degree (7/6/2013-30/06/2018)

| | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | Total |
|---------------------------------|--------|-------|-------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Convention refugee status | 229 | 1,223 | 3,647 | 2,451 | 9,308 | 5,658 | 22,516 |
| Complementary protection status | 93 | 487 | 347 | 249 | 1,049 | 1,102 | 3,327 |
| Rejected (in substance) | 1, 754 | 4,254 | 4,434 | 6,587 | 12,138 | 7,369 | 36,536 |
| Rejected (in admissibility) | 261 | 1,453 | 2,019 | 15,242 | 22,473 | 2,269 | 43,717 |
| a) Safe third country | | | | 1,313 | 921 | 227 | |
| (Readmission agreements) | | | | | | | |
| b) EU Dublin Regulation | | | | 2,069 | 8,305 | 1,435 | |
| c) EU Resettlement Program | | | | 11,000 | 12,322 | 32 | |
| d) Subsequent applications | | | | 776 | 915 | 572 | |
| e) Typical reasons | | | | 84 | 10 | 3 | |
| Resignations | 243 | 1,078 | 2,373 | 2,390 | 6,705 | 4,549 | 17,338 |
| Total | 2,580 | 8,495 | 12,82 | 26,919 | 51,673 | 20,947 | 123,43 |
| | | | 0 | | | | 4 |

Source: Ministry for Migration Policy (5/7/2018)

Conclusions

Since 2011, Greece has faced an unprecedented wave of irregular migration arrivals. Moreover, the long economic crisis has negatively affected the state apparatus which was unprepared for urgent and massive accommodation. In 2015 over a million refugees and migrants reached Europe by dangerously crossing the Mediterranean Sea especially through the Aegean Sea, the external border of the EU. In 2015 EU adopted measures in respect of the European Agenda on Migration which were fruitless. As a result, the EU closed the borders in March 2016 entrapping thousands of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in Greece. At first, the closing of borders rapidly ameliorated migration statistics in the EU. For example, new arrivals of migrants and asylum seekers have been significantly reduced as well as the total death toll recorded in the Mediterranean Sea. On the other hand, in Greece, the general situation has worsened. The number of applications for asylum has risen, new camps for refugees and migrants have opened and the hotspots (camps) of the Aegean Sea are overcrowded. A survey which was conducted between June and August 2018 inside the camps showed that although important humanitarian aid is provided, the people in the camps do not want to stay in Greece. The Dublin Regulation has created a huge human prison in Greece, Italy, Malta and Spain which is not affordable. In a long term perspective, the international financial assistance is not a proper solution because it only causes a vicious circle. Greece cannot incorporate such huge populations into daily life and Greek society. The Greek state has not got the ability to cope with the situation which arose after the closing of Greece’s northern borders. After this closing, Greece, Italy and Spain have disproportionately received flows of asylum seekers. Although the EU and especially the rich

countries of the North finance programs for asylum seekers in order to keep them far from their countries, this cannot last forever.

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