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STORY OF A JOURNEY ACROSS EUROPE

FROM FIRST RECEPTION TO INTEGRATION OF MIGRANTS

Published by:

**FEPS – FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN
PROGRESSIVE STUDIES**

Rue Montoyer, 40 – 1000 Brussels

www.feps-europe.eu

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Rue de Pascale, 4 - 6 – 1040 Brussels

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Photos by: Sara Prestianni

Design: Triptyque – Belgium

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ISBN: 978-2-930769-06-6 9782930769066

This book is produced with the financial support of the European Parliament.



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FOREWORD

Conny Reuter, SOLIDAR

Ernst Stetter, Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS)

In 2015-2016, when the influx of refugees trying to escape from conflict and persecution and seek asylum in Europe was at its climax, the Foundation for European Progressive Studies and SOLIDAR launched the project “From Europe to local: Migrating solidarity”, which aimed at analysing the crucial role that civil society organisations all over Europe played in offering assistance, support and comfort to migrants wishing to integrate in European societies. The book that resulted from the study also focused on the, more often than not, difficult relations between NGOs and public authorities – at local, national and European level – responsible for the integration process.

Since then, the flows of migrants entering Europe through the Eastern Mediterranean route has sharply declined, partly due to the controversial EU-Turkey Agreement signed in March 2016, while the even more dangerous¹ Central Mediterranean route has become – particularly during the first half of 2017 – the “preferred” maritime channel to Europe for migrants and asylum seekers.²

The risk of being swallowed by the Mediterranean Sea is just one of many faced by the hundreds of thousands of men, women and children who are ready to flee their home countries to find a safe haven in Europe. Their journey begins far away and often involves the crossing of deserts just as treacherous as the sea, as well as the physical and psychological abuse, torture and rape perpetrated by ruthless human traffickers and smugglers.

Once arrived in Europe, however, the journey of these people, who have already suffered enormous difficulties to reach what they consider a better and safer place, is far from over. A new journey starts across Europe and through the maze of its Member States’ bureaucracy and procedures to seek protection, asylum or simply the right to remain. A long path that, while it may not put their lives in danger, will certainly test their resilience, and that, for the luckiest ones, will eventually lead to integration in the host society.

It is not an easy path, the one that frequently starts on some Greek island or in an Italian harbour and ends in a European town, often in Germany, one of the most sought-after final destinations of the migrants’ year-long journeys and the country that in Europe is hosting the largest number of refugees.

Migrants have to struggle with sometimes inadequate services, learn a foreign language, and understand the habits,

customs, laws and cultural traditions of the host societies, in order to manage daily life, avoid tensions with – not always welcoming – local communities, and finally contribute to the host economy and society. They need to be accompanied in this difficult physical and cultural journey by competent professionals, experienced public authorities and suitable resources. This is often not the case. Both Italy and Greece – countries that were still struggling in the wake of the longest and most serious economic crisis in the EU’s history – were obviously not ready to face the huge inflows of refugees and migrants of the last few years and had to adjust legislation and establish reception services fit for the task. A goal that has been met with mixed results.

In this context, international organisations and NGOs play a crucial role to ensure access to all the services that migrants may need and to complement – and, at times, make up for – those provided by national authorities.

Aware, on the one hand, of the difficulties that migrants face once they arrive in Europe, and, on the other hand, of the challenges that offering adequate services and support represent for the host countries, and building on the experience of last year’s FEPS-SOLIDAR project, we decided to focus our attention on this journey across Europe, from the problems of the very first reception to the integration stage. Furthermore, as the number of vulnerable migrants, namely women and minors, has been growing, we decided that particular attention should be paid to them, their needs and the services offered to them. The result of our efforts is this book, an assessment of first reception services in Greece and Italy and of the integration of young migrants in Germany. The book symbolically covers the three countries that have been most affected – in absolute terms – by what has been called the refugee crisis; which is being defined by an increasing number of observers as a crisis of solidarity.

Human beings have always moved around, migration has always existed and even if the number of people on the move is increasing (and faster than the world population), it cannot be dealt with as an emergency or an anomaly, nor can we think of simply shutting our doors, for moral reasons, and because, as the Mediterranean case shows, migrants will just choose more dangerous and deadly routes to reach Europe. The question of managing migrant flows is beyond the scope of this book, but the idea that the question in general is to be addressed with solidarity and in full respect of human rights and dignity is inscribed in our European and progressive values.

1. According to the International Organisation for Migration “Since 2014, more deaths have been recorded on the Central Mediterranean route than any migration route worldwide”, while “The Mediterranean continues to account for the vast majority of deaths recorded globally”. IOM’s Global Migration Data Analysis Centre, Fatal Journeys, Volume 3, Part 1, 2017, available at https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/fatal_journeys_volume_3_part_1.pdf.

2. According to the UNHCR, from January to September 2017, 138,000 migrants arrived in Europe via the Mediterranean Sea, of these, 104,800 arrived in Italy. However, since July 2017 the number of people entering Europe via the Central Mediterranean route has declined (compared to the same period the previous year), while the Western Mediterranean route to Spain has recorded an 8% increase. See UNHCR, Europe Monthly Report, September 2017, available at <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/60384>.

INTRODUCTION

Hedwig Giusto, Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS)
Elsa Laino, SOLIDAR

Every migration story is a journey. A journey that for the migrants trying to reach the European Union usually starts long before they finally reach its borders. It is a hazardous journey that begins in the country of origin and continues through the countries of transit. Many migrants will face abuse, detention, torture and inhumane treatment on the way. Nevertheless, left with no other option to reach European shores than embarking on dangerous routes and entrusting their lives and those of their dear ones to unscrupulous smugglers, migrants decide to take this journey. For many it is lethal. For the ones who make it alive to the EU, a new journey will begin.

This can start in a hotspot, in a port, for many even on a search-and-rescue boat. From the moment of first reception to the actual possibility of being granted the right to remain in Europe, reaching the place where he or she wants to or can eventually start a new life, many months may go by, in some cases even years.

It is a journey through bureaucracy, through the patchwork of services and legal provisions from the local to the European level, through the gaps, the inconsistencies, the contradictions of legislation and actual procedures. It is a journey of separation and possible reunification with loved ones. A journey of loss, frustration, disillusionment, disappointment, but also of hope, personal development and realisation.

At what stage of the journey does the European Union become involved? Do the root causes of forced migration fall under the responsibility of the EU? Is the EU concerned with the human rights conditions of the migrants while they transit in third countries on their way to the Europe? Or does the EU only become concerned from the moment when the person physically arrives in the territory of the EU?

The answers to these questions are a matter of political choice, and the political approach chosen has several implications for the migration management system implemented. By applying a human-rights based approach, the EU has a moral duty to contribute to wealth redistribution, alleviate the effects of poverty, save people's lives. Yet, offering international protection to persons fleeing conflict and persecution is not only an ethical question, but also a legal obligation provided for by international law. An obligation that not all the EU Member States have recognised and that, as is well known, has led to a deep political crisis within the European Union, creating a divide between those Member States that due to their geographical position have found themselves on the forefront in the rescue and reception of asylum seekers and migrants, and those that have, on the contrary, chosen to shut their doors, claiming their supposed right to preserve the uniformity of their cultural, religious or national identity, or pleading alleged security concerns.

The choice of one or the other of these perspectives, one focusing on human rights or the other on security, has an

impact on the general approach to migration flow management as well as asylum rules. This has triggered a wide debate that is still on-going within the European Union and within the Member States. The debate itself is beyond the aim of this book, but it is important to recognise how crucial it is, because at risk are not only the lives and futures of those people who have embarked on a dangerous journey in the hope of reaching a safe haven or the chance to build a better life, but also the European Union's capability of upholding the very same values of solidarity, respect for human rights, as well as for the dignity of the persons on which it was built 60 years ago.

While the debate continues in Brussels and the EU capitals on the question of migration and asylum (the emergency approach that has characterised the initial response to the so-called refugee crisis is gradually being replaced by a longer-term and more comprehensive approach, which is however not free from controversy) people continue to migrate, as moving is a right as well as a need for human beings, and continue to reach the European shores, even if at a slower pace.

Currently the most commonly used migratory route to the European Union is the Central Mediterranean maritime route. This is also one of the most deadly routes in the world, with 2,961 people dying in the process of migration since the beginning of the year.¹ Against the background of a very dangerous migratory route and in the appalling absence of safe and legal alternatives for migrants and refugees to flee to the EU, a reception system based on a human rights approach should start with a proactive search and rescue operation. Although the European Union has decided to gradually reduce its investment and efforts in these activities, these operations are essential to prevent death and protect the most vulnerable.

From the moment of disembarkation, migrants will encounter the first reception system of the country of entry. First reception services include the provision of medical first aid, the distribution of food, blankets, hygiene kits, psychological first aid, as well as legal counselling.

At European level, reception conditions are regulated by the Reception Condition Directive², which sets out the standards for the reception of applicants for international protection in order to make sure that asylum seekers are provided with adequate living conditions and have access to housing, food, clothing, healthcare, education for minors and access to employment under certain circumstances – all services that should ensure not only their physical survival, but also the preservation of their dignity.

Despite attempts at harmonisation, however, the reception conditions and the standard offered are still very diverse from Member State to Member State, with countries at the border (namely Italy and Greece)³ under the heavy pressure

of having to deal with the emergency. It is the gap created by the reception system on paper and the situation of mass arrival that actually took place that is the crux of the problem.

In order to fill this gap, the EU proposed the establishment of the so-called hotspots approach, which foresees a comprehensive reception system in which the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), the EU Border Agency (Frontex), the EU Police Cooperation Agency (Europol) and the EU Judicial Cooperation Agency (Eurojust) work together with the authorities of the frontline Member States to help them to fulfil their obligations under EU law and swiftly identify, register and fingerprint incoming migrants. The hotspots approach was also key to implementing the temporary relocation scheme proposed by the European Commission, which was terminated at the end of September 2017 with quite disappointing results.⁴

It is in this context that this book was conceived and produced by the Foundation for European Progressive Studies and SOLIDAR, following on from the previous project, “From Europe to local: Migrating solidarity”, implemented in 2015-2016, which offered a comparative analysis of the models of cooperation between different administrative levels in delivering policies for the integration of migrants and refugees.

The present volume aims instead at providing an assessment of the different steps, difficulties and challenges that economic and humanitarian migrants must overcome during their journey across Europe, and the procedures in place from first reception on arrival to the integration in society and the labour market of asylum seekers and migrants. The three contributions of which this volume is composed focus on three case studies, Greece, Italy and Germany, and concentrate in particular on an analysis of the situation of women and minors, whose percentage among migrants (traditionally composed mainly of adult men) has steadily grown in the last couple of years, often catching largely unprepared authorities, institutions and organisations that must provide the necessary services to the new arrivals off guard.

The contributions on Greece by Angeliki Dimitraidi and on Italy by Enza Roberta Petrillo focus mainly on the very first stages of reception in the two Mediterranean countries, show some of the gaps in the application of the EU approach and raise serious questions about the full respect of human rights of such reception methods, especially regarding vulnerable migrants with specific needs such as women and children. Both chapters underline the essential role played by civil society organisations in providing essential services and in complementing, when not fully replacing, the work of the public institutions.

Dimitriadi underlines three main points. Firstly, that the Greek state was extremely late in providing adequate services, relying instead to a large extent on the efforts made by the NGOs. Secondly, that even if reception services are now, more or less, streamlined, there is little coordination between first and secondary reception (covering,

for example, accommodation in reception centres as well as financial allowances), with the result that it hinders the possibility of following and accompanying migrants through all the steps of the process that should eventually lead to full integration. Furthermore, Greece is still lacking a comprehensive action plan on integration. If this, as Dimitriadi notes, was initially due to the supposed transitory nature of the migratory flows, now that the emergency is officially over and that a substantial number of migrants are in Greece to stay, measures should be taken urgently in order to promote the inclusion of refugees in Greek society. Last but not least, the chapter on the case of Greece highlights the extent to which gender and vulnerability dimensions were neglected by the Greek authorities, particularly during the peak of the crisis, when the focus was mostly on emergency assistance. It is to be stressed, however, that Greece was already facing extremely serious economic problems when the enormous flows of migrants and asylum seekers started to land on its territory. Also, the speed and volume of the arrivals were such that for a long while emergency response seems to be the only possible option.

Like Greece, Italy’s reception system has been under heavy pressure in the last few years. In her analysis of the Italian case, Enza Roberta Petrillo underlines the dysfunctional nature of the existing reception system, which the multiple laws introduced with the aim of dealing with the increasing number of arrivals and complying with the European regulations have neither solved nor made more transparent. In particular, the author underlines the fact that the existence on paper of a streamlined reception process that provides for first assistance to migrants and refugees in hotspots (where they go through a first screening, pre-identification and fingerprinting and should receive information about their rights and the legal procedures to be granted protection) and then their transfer to a regional hub, where their application should be formalised, has not led in practice to a significant improvement of the procedures or of the services provided. Moreover, this phase of reception, that should by definition be quick and smooth, tends to be slow, forcing migrants to stay for a long time in very large and inadequate facilities that should only be used for short periods. Better practices however exist, as a few examples given by the author prove, and they show how small numbers not only allow a better treatment of refugees and migrants, but also facilitate a smoother integration in the local social fabric.

The last chapter that symbolically closes this journey across European reception challenges focuses, as mentioned, on the inclusion of young refugees and migrants in Germany. The two authors, Alejandro Rada and Irina Bohn, reverse the perspective of the two previous chapters, which examined the legislation and services provided to support migrants, to focus instead on the young migrants themselves – who, as said earlier, constitute an increasingly larger part of the new arrivals – and on their personal potential, in order to better understand how welfare systems can build on this in order to favour their social inclusion. Starting from the assumption that in Germany young refugees are seldom considered as

independent holders of rights and as such have been disregarded by politics, and that their status forces them into a condition of “significant disadvantage” compared with their German peers, they draw the conclusion that the German welfare system should take into consideration personal needs and circumstances when approaching the young refugees, building a relationship based on trust, with the aim of favouring a positive attitude towards the institutions and, at the same time, of fostering their personal resources in order to produce a change in their lives.

The three chapters are complemented by the photos taken by Italian professional photographer Sara Prestianni, who has worked extensively in the migration field, particularly during the so-called refugee crisis. Her pictures, like this entire volume, cannot fully describe the troubles that migrants face once they arrive in Europe after an already dramatic journey. We believe however it is important to illustrate, with words as well as with images, the difficulties migrants face in a country with a different language, culture, laws and customs, and how the provision of adequate legislative frameworks, procedures, services and structures is not only essential to ensure the respect of human rights but also to increase the chances that the newcomers might one day become full and productive members of European societies.

1. See data on <https://missingmigrants.iom.int/region/mediterranean>.

2. The text of the Reception Conditions Directive is available at <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013L0033&from=EN>.

3. The number of arrivals in Greece has sharply declined since March 2016, when the Deal between the European Union and Turkey was agreed and as of 31 July 2017 Greece is no longer considered in a state of emergency (see in this volume the chapter on Greece by A. Dimitriadi). In Italy, by contrast, arrivals increased in 2016 and in the first half of 2017.

4. About 28,000 people relocated out of the 160,000 originally planned. See http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-3081_en.htm.

THE LONG ROAD TO INTEGRATION – POSSIBILITIES AND OBSTACLES FOR NEWLY ARRIVED ASYLUM SEEKERS IN GREECE

Angeliki Dimitriadi, Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy¹

The Mediterranean Sea is not a new migratory corridor, although it has become a prominent one in recent years. Maritime arrivals have been a relatively common occurrence for both Greece and Italy. However, the increase in sea arrivals from 2012 onwards, firstly to Italy and eventually to Greece can be attributed primarily to the Arab Spring of 2011 and events that followed, culminating with the Syrian civil war.

In 2015 and 2016 an estimated 1,048,646 migrants² entered the European Union (EU) primarily through the Greek-Turkish maritime border. The unprecedented influx strained the limited resources and capacity available in Greece and it is fair to say that in 2015 the State was absent from the provision of first reception. The refugee 'crisis' of 2015 was multifaceted in Greece. It was a 'crisis' of numbers but predominantly a 'crisis' in reception management. Amidst one of the largest humanitarian flows to Europe, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society mobilised in an unparalleled manner. NGOs with significant experience in setting up refugee camps, protection and healthcare deployed originally in Northern Greece and the five islands functioning as entry points (Lesbos, Kos, Samos, Chios and Leros). Assisted by international organisations such as UNHCR and IOM, but also by volunteers (locals and foreigners), NGOs have arguably been the most critical actor amidst the refugee 'crisis' in Greece, often undertaking the responsibilities of the Greek State. It is important to note however, that this level of deployment and involvement was made possible by the declaration of a state of emergency and the official request of the Greek government to the European Commission for assistance. The funding that has allowed for and facilitated the presence of NGOs in Greece is largely covered by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO), which for the first time since its inception offered humanitarian assistance to a European Member State for aid for refugees.

The funding offered by DG ECHO for humanitarian aid allowed for a geographical spread of services, covering the islands and the mainland. However, as of 31 July 2017 Greece is no longer considered to be in a state of emergency.³ As of 1 August, the funding and management of services at migrant and refugee camps will be handled by the Greek government, with DG ECHO continuing to fund programmes on the mainland. There is a dual purpose to this. On the one hand, the eyes of European policy makers are trained on Italy's unfolding 'crisis' of increasing maritime arrivals mainly from Libya. On the other hand, Greece and its partners acknowledge that it is important to move from an emergency response to integration. The latter requires a very different framework, services and partners as well as a strategic plan. As this report will discuss there remains a significant gap from reception to integration that has long existed in Greek migration policy.

The purpose of this paper is to trace the services offered to new arrivals from the moment of their reception to their eventual integration to the country with a particular focus

on women and children. This has been done with the kind assistance of NGOs⁴ approached for information, secondary literature and interviews with informants employed in service provision that have requested anonymity.

It is important to highlight that access to services from the moment of entry to integration is not a linear nor straightforward process and in Greece particularly, policies implemented in 2016 drastically altered the situation in the country impacting the journey but also the potential integration of those stranded in the country. Furthermore, with few exceptions, the islands function separate from and outside of the framework in place in the mainland. This creates a certain incoherence in the effort to map out services. Those who arrived before the EU-Turkey Statement of 18 March 2016 face different structural obstacles from those currently stranded on the islands.

Thus, rather than following a geographical journey, which in this case will confuse the reader since there are different outcomes and access to services, the report is structured thematically. The paper opens with a snapshot of the emergency period of 2015-2016. The second section narrows in on the critical aspects of reception and integration and maps the services on offer mainly through NGOs. Reception has two stages. First reception pertains to the provision of services on arrival (shelter, food, medical aid, interpretation, information on rights). There is a second level of reception, which (in theory) links to integration in the medium and long term. Both exist at one level or another in Greece but there is no direct link between the two. In practice, one may not receive first reception services but access secondary reception, and vice versa, or in rare cases enter the reception system from the beginning till the end (integration). The present article briefly discusses first reception but acknowledges that despite the presence of a legal framework and attempts to achieve it, in fact it is the second level of reception that has the potential to link to integration and this is where there is a gap in Greece.

Greece is also an interesting case of a lack of focus on women and children. As will be discussed, until 2015 the gender and vulnerability dimensions were not prominent and amidst the refugee crisis, the focus shifted on emergency assistance to all. The discussion on integration, gender and vulnerability is recent and still in its early stages. The reader will quickly realise that the Greek State is largely absent from the narrative. This is partly because there was no mechanism in place to address the arrival of asylum seekers but also because the funding provided by DG ECHO was mainly offered to international organisations and NGOs rather than the Ministries. The latter in 2015 and 2016 appeared to complement the work of UNHCR and NGOs, rather than vice versa. The article is not exhaustive in the NGOs it discusses, nor in the services offered. Interpretation services for example offered by NGO METAdrasi, have been instrumental in ensuring people on the move receive information (from rights to basic services) in a language they understand. Another of the NGOs was 'Earth' – a small-scale environmen-

tal organisation that provided educational programmes for children – deployed towards the end of 2015. It began providing sustenance to migrants arriving in Piraeus, but also in camps where in the early days migrants were left to fend for themselves. The scale of mobilisation makes it impossible to refer to everyone and all the services provided. Instead, the article maps out what is done by some of the main NGOs that have been active both in camps, islands but also the mainland seeking to give the reader an idea of the direction of services on offer for those who are outside the hotspots and in the mainland.

Throughout the article, the term migrant is used often and on purpose. It is important to highlight that individuals have complex and often overlapping motivations for leaving their countries of origin. Though categorisations have legal usefulness, in reality it is often difficult to pinpoint one particular push factor that clearly situates an individual into one category. Economic migrants often leave due to extreme poverty and high unemployment, while those fleeing conflict will often discuss the impact of insecurity in the job market and financial survival. The term migrant denotes border movement, rather than reasons for migrating and in that sense is an all-inclusive term designating people on the move. On the other hand, integration can only refer to those authorised to stay in the country, usually through acquiring some form of protection. The new arrivals entered across the Greek border irregularly, and integration is only applicable to those who have either applied for asylum and are awaiting a decision or who have been awarded protection and will stay in the country.

The emergency years: 2015-2016

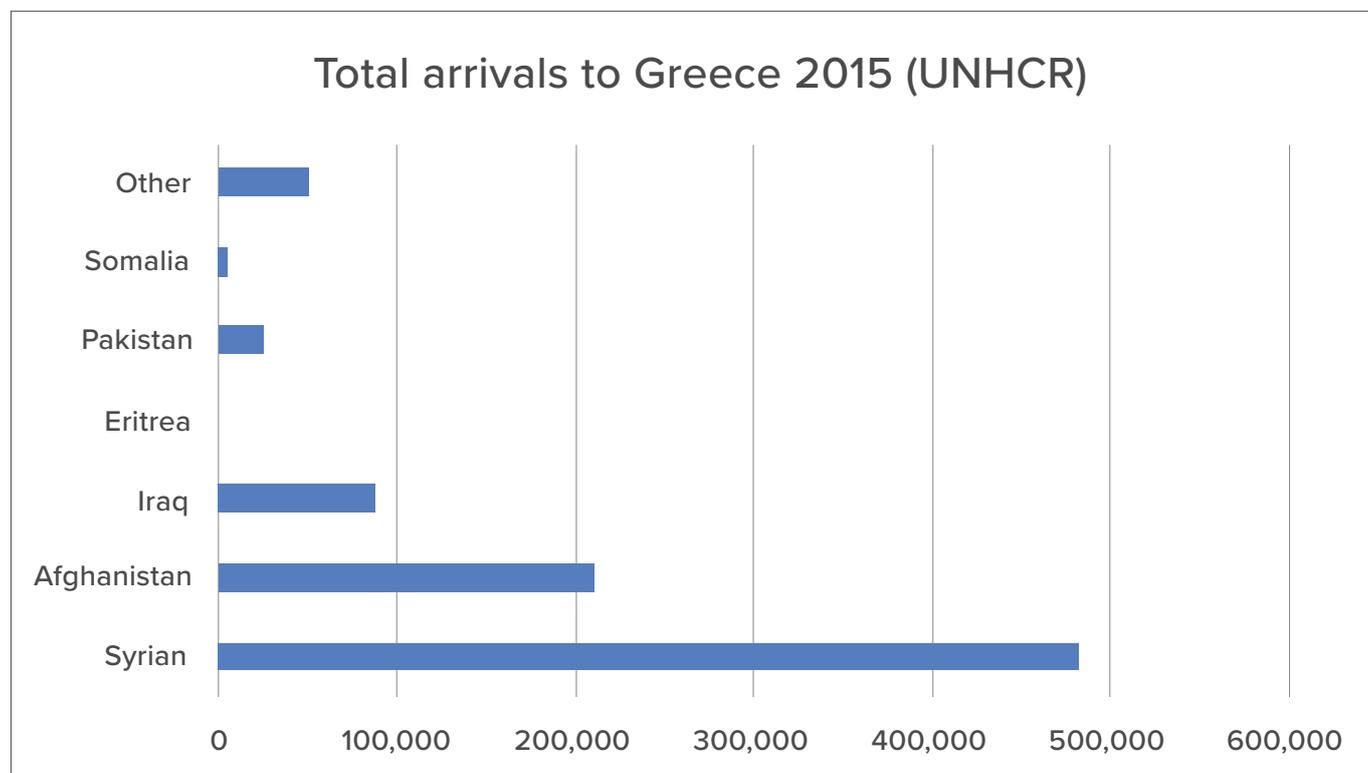
In 2015, migrants arrived mainly on five islands of the northern Aegean: Lesbos, Kos, Leros, Samos and Chios. Lesbos bore the brunt of the arrivals. In October of 2015 roughly 140,000 migrants landed on the island of Lesbos alone. The picture is significantly different in 2016, with the bulk of arrivals recorded until March 2016, when the EU-Turkey Statement came into effect. For the entire year, Greece registered 173,450 arrivals, a significant number but one in line with irregular flows of the past (especially the period 2008-2010).





ARRIVAL IN LESBOS, NOVEMBER 2015

Table 1: Total arrivals to Greece 2015



Source: UNHCR, Monthly Arrivals by Nationality to Greece (Jan-Dec 2015) adapted by author

The speed and volume of movement is important in understanding why it was impossible to consider anything other than an emergency response for 2015 and partly 2016. The main priority was search and rescue, quick transfer from the islands to the mainland (to alleviate overcrowding) and emergency healthcare provision. The focus of the response was on the Syrians, due to their numbers but also the advocacy that was undertaken by various organisations including UNHCR. The problem with this approach is that the Syrians were quickly differentiated from the other nationalities, and the national mechanism geared towards addressing their needs first, leaving other – equally vulnerable – groups on the sidelines.⁵ The differentiation of nationalities has been highlighted by the migrants themselves in accessing asylum but also basic material provisions.⁶

Alongside the increased numbers, different nationalities and motives, the gender distribution changed. Throughout the first year of the ‘crisis’, police and coastguard authorities recorded data in a fragmented manner. Two sources offer a partial picture of the gender distribution, UNHCR data and the Asylum Service applications.

According to a snapshot of the UNHCR for the period June 2015-January 2016, the percentage was 36% children, 21% women and 43% men.⁷ The asylum data show similarly that the presence of women increased significantly in comparison to the past in asylum applications. The shift in gender is crucial. Women and minors have additional needs on arrival that can often be left unattended in an emergency response. The previous years of male-dominated migratory flows also meant that the national authorities were not adequately prepared to address the presence of women and children, often from different cultural backgrounds.⁸

Table 2: Asylum applications (Jan 2016-Nov 2016)

Gender	Total asylum applications
Female	16563
Minors (unaccompanied)	2072

Source: Greek Asylum Service, 2016 data



WOMAN IN A CAMP IN CHIOS, AUGUST 2016

A snapshot of arrivals for August 2017 shows that the number of men and children remains high. 2,803 persons entered in August, of which 906 were children and 857 were men, with 486 registered women.

There is a lack of clear data on unaccompanied minors (UMAs). The most reliable source for unaccompanied minors particularly is the National Centre for Social Solidarity (EKKA) that is responsible for referring UAMs to shelters. As of August 2017, the estimated number of UAMs in the country was 2,700 but this figure only refers to referrals to EKKA. UAMs are often unregistered, especially if they have not been identified by an authority/ NGO or applied for asylum and thus the figure should be treated with caution.

Significant changes took place in the last months of 2015 and early 2016. Five hotspots per the European Agenda on Migration were established on the island-entry points in northern Aegean; refugee camps opened across the country to shelter those stranded in the country; a massive pre-registration programme took place for 25,000 would-be asylum seekers through the Asylum Service and UNHCR; and NGOs

in partnership with UNHCR and the financial support of DG ECHO offered basic services and provisions in the camps (with some also active in the hotspots especially for interpretation and medical assistance). The landscape changed drastically following the EU-Turkey Statement of March 2016, the closure of Idomeni and the Western Balkan corridor and the effective stranding of more than 65,000 persons in Greece. Until the closure of the Western Balkan route the journey through Greece would average a week to ten days, with arrival on the islands, emergency care by NGOs, registration at the police department, and eventual travel to Athens from where migrants would board trains, rent taxis/cars, and reach Thessaloniki, Idomeni and cross to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM).



CAMP IN CHIOS, AUGUST 2016

Reception and integration in 2015-2016

Amidst the largest influx of its contemporary history, the question around reception – on arrival but also after an asylum application – and integration emerged. It is noteworthy that in 2015 Greece lacked a functioning FRS. Its personnel, where available, assisted with registration of fingerprints and referrals but did not provide accommodation, health services or subsistence to incoming asylum-seekers. The services were offered by the NGOs that deployed towards the end of 2015 initially in some islands and Idomeni and gradually across the country, and civil society organisations that proved remarkably capable of adapting to a constantly changing situation on the ground. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), for example, eventually distributed through their mobile teams a kit composed of items identified through a survey as essential for migrants travelling through Greece and the Balkans, namely: a blanket, energy bars, soap, toothpaste and toothbrush, all wrapped together in a backpack.⁹ The organisation noted that one of the main challenges was the refusal of patients to be referred to health services in Greece (e.g. hospitals) since they saw it as a setback on their

journey onwards through the Balkans. Other NGOs as well as UNHCR created kits for the journey or deployed mobile teams at critical junctures to provide migrants with food and water for the road as well as medical checks.

The services during the ‘crisis’ were very specific and gender neutral, due to the emergency. First reception was almost solely focused on the islands and eventually Idomeni (during the period when the Western Balkan route was open). Neither ‘site’ had official FRS shelters.

First Reception underwent legal reform in 2016. The reform did not originate as a response to the absence of sufficient reception services but in an effort to implement the EU-Turkey Statement of 18 March 2016. The bill submitted before the Parliament proposed significant reforms in asylum law, sought to restructure the available services but also facilitate the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement (particularly the safe third country rule). L4375/2016 had the lengthy title “on the organisation and operation of the Asylum Service, the Appeals Authority, the Reception and Identification Service, the establishment of the General

Secretariat for Reception, the transposition into Greek legislation of the provisions of Directive 2013/32/EC". L4375/2016 partly transposed the detention criteria outlined in the recast Reception Conditions Directive, but the Directive in full has yet to be transposed into national law. This means that reception of asylum seekers continues to be regulated by Presidential Decree 220/2007 which transposed the 2003/9/EC Directive.

L4375/2016 set up a Reception and Identification Service, operationally defined as responsible for¹⁰ the registration, identification and data verification procedures, medical screening, identification of vulnerable persons, the provision of information, especially for international or another form of protection and return procedures, as well as the temporary stay of third-country nationals or stateless persons entering the country without complying with the legal formalities and their further referral to the appropriate reception or temporary accommodation structures. It further prescribed the establishment, operation and supervision of centres and structures for the purposes of those procedures – Reception and Identification Centres (RIC) as well as open temporary accommodation facilities.

Reception in the RICs includes the registration of personal data including fingerprints, verification of identity and nationality (through interview where needed), medical screening

and provision of psychosocial support where needed, updated information on rights and obligations including access to international protection but also voluntary return programmes, identification of vulnerability and referral to appropriate care, referral of asylum applicants to appropriate authority, referral of those opting out of the asylum process to the competent authorities in the RIC for readmission, removal or voluntary return procedure.

The RICs at present are the current hotspots although according to the bill they can be any facility designed and designated for first reception services.¹¹ Restriction of freedom of movement for 25 days is inscribed in the law (as in the hotspots) and if the individual within that time has applied but not received a response from the asylum service, they can be referred – in theory – to appropriate facilities for accommodation until their decision is issued.

MIGRANTS WAITING IN LINE, PORT OF PIRAEUS, ATHENS, MARCH 2016



Secondary reception, i.e. outside detention and after arrival, also covers material conditions, including accommodation in reception centres and a financial allowance.¹² The latter cannot exceed the social welfare benefits received by Greek citizens. This type of reception is, in theory, linked to integration or the potential for integration.

Integration is a national competence and precisely due to its nature it requires State authorities to undertake the organisation, process and oversight of migrant integration. NGOs can only contribute and assist but if we understand integration as the gradual acquisition of civil, political and social rights then by default these can only be granted by the State.

In Greece there is no Action Plan on Integration and no coherent future planning on how to integrate the remaining population, partly due to the transitory nature of the movement but also partly due to the assumption that relocation would work and a significant portion would leave the country.

Nowadays, Greece is no longer in an emergency and the migrant population is no longer transitory. The concern is less about first reception (i.e. on arrival) and more about secondary reception and integration. With no Action Plan on Integration and with relocation (see below) progressing very slowly, Greece is faced with the daunting task of integrating those who in fact seek to settle in another destination. Since 2016, reception capacity has increased, with reception approached in the framework of the Reception Conditions Directive. The remaining section of the paper will focus on discussing the services offered either by the State or more often-than-not by NGOs regarding reception in the mainland. The islands are not discussed in this report since they are outside any discussion on integration and reception is approached as a temporary issue pending their return to Turkey.

Reception and integration services provided by NGOs

In the absence of an official strategy on integration and a weak official reception capacity, NGOs stepped up in the spring and summer of 2016, and throughout 2017 to both offer reception services and assist (where possible) with integration. NGOs in Greece are implementing partners for the provision of accommodation, interpretation and medical services and facilitate referrals for asylum, information, and aspects of integration such as education and access to the labour market. Thus, their role, though important, should be complementary to what is on offer from the State. Certain key areas have been identified and discussed here, in line also with what reception and integration entail. Thus, accommodation, along with a brief discussion on the cash-aid programme, access to health care, education and labour market, are the focus of the analysis. The latter two are intrinsically linked with integration, while accommodation and health care are a necessity (as well as a right particularly for health care) both from reception through to integration.

Accommodation

The first type of accommodation to emerge were the camps across the mainland. They were followed by a steady increase in accommodation capacity for minors and eventually the UNHCR-led accommodation scheme.

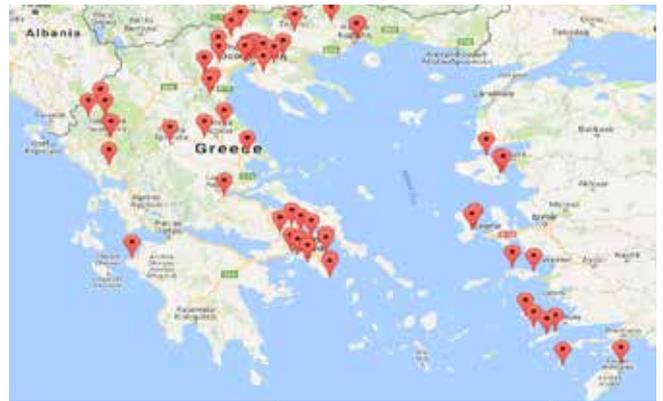
Camps

Towards the end of 2015 various temporary camps emerged on the islands and the mainland, partly set up by NGOs and civil society in an effort to cover the dire need for accommodation. Most did not meet the reception standards inscribed in the legislation, however this is attributed largely to the emergency situation that in practice prevented those involved from offering anything other than basic services and assistance.



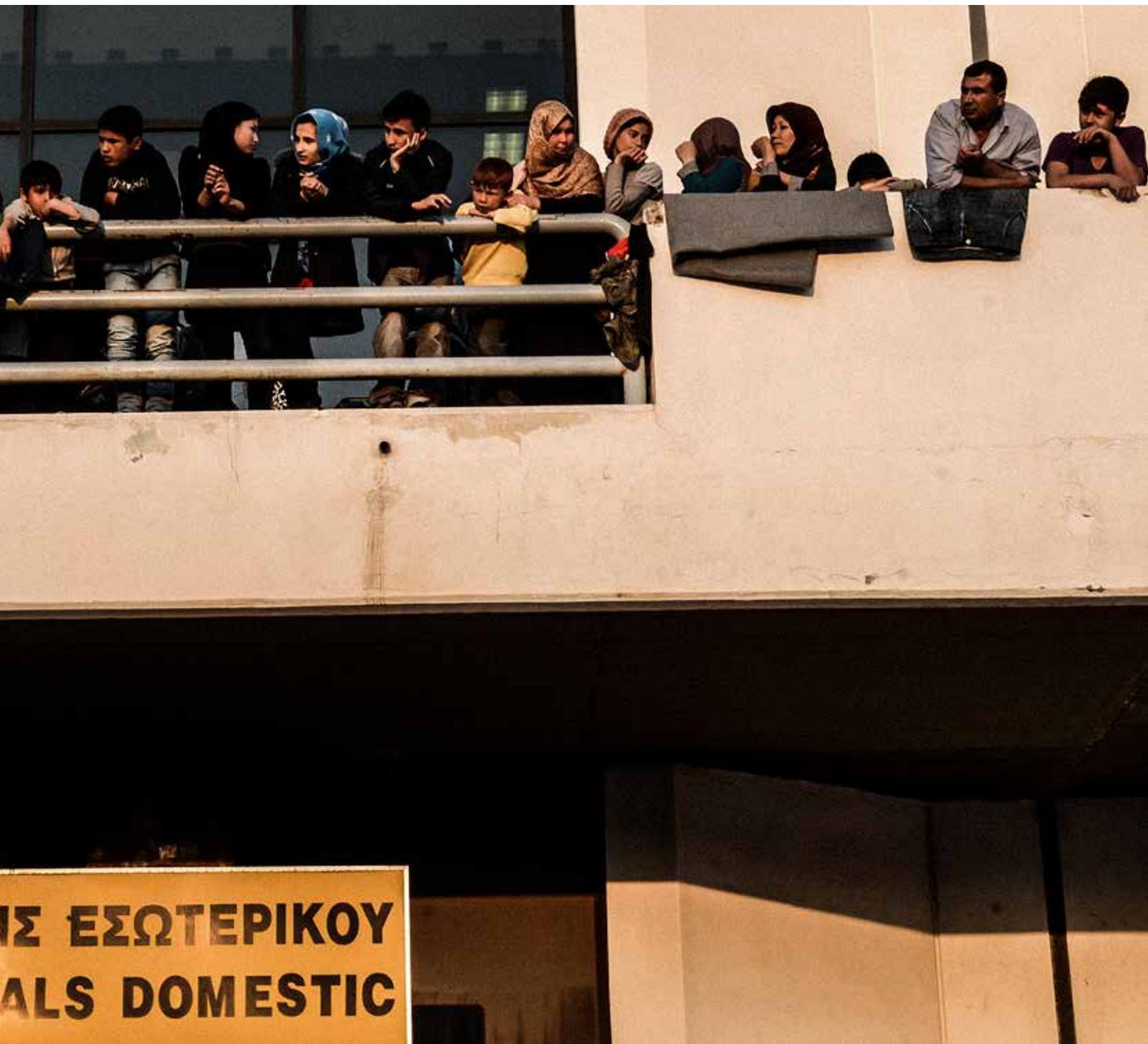
CAMPS IN GREECE AS OF SEPTEMBER 2017

The list of camps continuously changes, with unofficial ones springing up in various locations, officials closing down and people moving towards other accommodation schemes. As such, it is difficult to give an exact number of camps at present particularly unofficial ones. Based on updated data as of end of August 2017, approximately 36 camps remained open across the country,¹³ of those, the camps ran by the Ministry of Migration Policy are the Eleonas camp¹⁴ and the hotspot/detention facilities on the islands (five in total). All other camps are technically the responsibility of the Ministry but are run by NGOs¹⁵ often in cooperation with UNHCR, NGOs in cooperation with RIS, IOM and RIS and/or IOM and NGOs but also the Hellenic Army and Hellenic Airforce. The Army remains involved in the site management (usually in partnership with an NGO) of former military basis and accommodation sites. As of 21 February 2017, a total 14,350 persons were accommodated in these sites, which counted a total nominal capacity of 30,676 places.



Source: map provided by GreekVol.Info, available at <http://greecevol.info/place.list.php?tag%5B68%5D=1&filter=set&mysearch=&sort=place>¹⁶

INFORMAL CAMP IN ELLENIKIO, ATHENS, MARCH 2016



Camps pose a challenge in the discussion of reception and integration. As spaces, they are situated both physically but also socially outside society. They are meant to create 'otherness' precisely because those in the camps are treated as temporary guests that will either eventually settle, leave or even be returned. Many of the camps in Greece were set up in remote locations, making access to urban centres difficult. Another problem was that there was often an overlap of services and focus between NGOs. One example of this is in Diavata (northern Greece). There were 14 NGOs in the camp and many focused on children both in terms of protection and also reception services (food, clothing, activities). The largest gender group, the men, were left mostly unattended. ARSIS, an NGO involved in the Diavata camp, pointed out that it is imperative to ensure people are engaged and active while in the camp, with inaction being a critical problem. The organisation initially offered activities that sought to engage all groups in the camp, from minors to women and men. Social activities like tea, movies, as well as more creative sessions (e.g. rosary-making) took place.

Many NGOs, including ARSIS, offered language course to women and children as well as men, both English and Greek courses, depending on the availability of volunteer teachers. Creative workshops for women have taken place in most camps in an effort to allow for social interaction but also alleviate the feeling of isolation that many migrants have experienced in the camps. Yet, precisely because of the structure and nature of camps, integration is a challenge for it requires direct contact with the local population.

Both ARSIS and Solidarity Now noted that day-excursions were instrumental in paving the way towards integration. ARSIS organised day trips to nearby towns, teaching migrants how to move around using local buses assisted by interpreters. The aim was to acquaint them with rules and customs, local places to see, etc. The ability to move independently is a critical first step for life outside a camp. The programme took place in Vassilika for men, in Diavata for women. The explicit aim was interaction with the local population and participation was voluntary.

Solidarity Now runs a similar scheme for migrants, utilising cultural visits (to sites, museums, places of historical importance) with the help of interpreters and guides, to bring together migrants with local history, culture and people.

Overall, heavy criticism was levelled towards Greece and the failure of the State to ensure adequate services and living conditions in most camps. Some NGOs like ASB have taken the responsibility for constructing longer-term camp facilities, such as the one taking place at Diavata Anagnostopoulou. ASB will be providing shelter for 936 individuals in 156 modular container (50 provided by Caritas Hellas Germany) units and 30 UAMs in rehabilitated premises in the camp, a total of 966 refugees. The original plan for UAMs in camps was to transfer them in the long term to residential centres, however a recent article in the Greek newspaper KATHIMERINI notes that more than 1,650 minors are outside appropriate



shelters and as a result “In an effort to provide an immediate solution, the creation of more “safe zones” within camps is promoted. [...] on 15 September 2017 the number of available places remained the same and the number of children outside organised structures increased according to EKKA”¹⁷ (author’s translation from Greek).

Despite the presence of NGOs, it is important to remember that the final responsibility and oversight remains in the hands of the Ministry of Migration Policy. Even where the site management was handed over to NGOs they essentially functioned as implementing partners. Though many had experience in setting up and running camps in Africa and Asia, the process in Greece was an entirely new experience



OFFICIAL CAMP IN ATHENS, AUGUST 2016

for most. Bureaucracy, lack of central coordination (UNHCR took over the role fairly late) and a transitory population with continuously fluctuating numbers proved significant obstacles in the setting up of organised, safe and ‘in line with expected EU standards’ camps. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) highlighted in June 2016 that: “Conditions in most of the reception facilities on the mainland, many of which are entirely unsuited to such use, fall far below acceptable standards in such basic areas as capacity, shelter, food, sanitation and medical care”.¹⁸ The same report notes that children are extremely vulnerable when living in squalid reception sites. On the other hand, NGOs like ARSIS have undertaken considerable effort in improving conditions for children through the setting up of

kindergartens and spaces for children, in camps, while social workers organise information sessions for women regarding employment and access to the labour market. Parent counselling groups also take place where ARSIS is present. As noted in the AIDA report update for 2016, despite the best efforts of various partners, destitution and homelessness continued to plague migrants.

Overall the lack of coordination of reception as well as the absence of a clear legal framework have been highlighted by the European Commission. It is worth remembering that NGOs to this day function in Greece on the basis either of memoranda of understanding with UNHCR or the Greek State or entirely autonomously. In practice, the monitoring system is lacking.

Housing scheme UNHCR and NGOs

The accommodation scheme by UNHCR and DG ECHO was meant to address both the problems in the camps but also facilitate the step towards integration. The programme was set up by UNHCR and the Greek State in partnership with NGOs and municipalities.

UNHCR's operational update of 29 August 2017 indicates that there are 19,397 accommodation places¹⁹ across the country. Of those 7,445 are located on the islands (police stations, RICs/ hotspots). An additional 1,154 on the islands are designated as places available in alternative accommodation sites, i.e. in the official refugee camps²⁰ and local NGOs ran shelters outside the coordination mechanism set up by UNHCR. The accommodation on the islands will not be discussed here since the recipients are outside the framework of reception/integration pending their asylum decision and/or return. We do need to acknowledge, though, that the conditions on the islands currently are a cause for concern, with services falling short of the Reception Directive and with the absence of a clear prospect for those in the RICs and in alternative accommodation.

The UNHCR accommodation scheme, in place since end of 2015, was initially designed only for asylum seekers eligible for relocation. UNHCR committed to 20,000 places in open accommodation places (apartments, hotels), funded by the European Commission and primarily dedicated to applicants for international protection eligible for relocation. This essentially covered only Syrians, Eritreans and Iraqis that had been registered with the asylum service. The accommodation scheme includes a wide range of services (information and interpretation services, psychosocial and legal support, recreational and educational activities, case management) with the aim to facilitate the temporary stay of participants in Greece. Thus, it is a holistic reception scheme albeit a temporary one due to the transitory nature of the recipients.

The slow speed of relocation and the EU-Turkey Statement altered the landscape around accommodation. UNHCR noted back in 2016 that "few sites meet humanitarian standards as basic needs and essential services are not always delivered".²¹ In discussion with NGO staff employed in refugee camps in northern Greece (anonymity requested) the poor quality of food and lack of hygiene conditions were noted, as well as the increased restlessness of guests that had little to do throughout the day and relied entirely on the ability of NGOs to provide recreational/educational services.

The target of 20,000 places was not met initially, and gradually, as the numbers stabilised in Greece, UNHCR opened the scheme to other asylum applicants, mainly to Dublin reunification candidates and applicants belonging to vulnerable groups. The programme is now at full capacity. Thus, the accommodation programme is no longer nationality based. Although hotels were used in some cases to house refugees, eventually it was decided that there should be a move to apartments to assist with integration. The scheme is undertaken in partnership with Praksis, CRS, Arsis, Nostos, Iliaktida, Solidarity Now, Faros, Municipality of Athens, Municipality of Livadia, Municipality of Thessaloniki, Heraklion Development Agency, and the Municipality of Andravida.²² UNHCR provides the funding and ensures service provisions are up to standards, while NGOs and municipalities are implementing partners.

Some accommodation schemes are a joint partnership of multiple actors. An example of this is the REACT – Refugee Assistance Collaboration Thessaloniki. The Municipality of Thessaloniki set up a Corporate Scheme to fill 660 refugee places in Thessaloniki. Participants in this are: Municipality of Thessaloniki, Municipality of Neapolis-Sykies, Municipality of Kalamaria, Central Macedonia Region, Christian Brothers of Thessaloniki, NGO PRAKSIS (Social Support and Medical Cooperation Development Programmes, ARSIS-Youth Support Organisation, Hellenic Council for Refugees, and Hellenic Association for Human Rights. ARSIS undertakes, as part of the implementation of the programme, the psychosocial support of the hosted families.

Solidarity Now is also one of the main implementing partners of the UNHCR scheme. It currently accommodates migrants in Athens, Thessaloniki, Ioanina and Evia as well as on the islands of Tilos (population 800, 50 refugees). The NGO highlighted in discussion the issue of location and the importance of identifying locations close to schools, medical services and regular access to the towns/cities nearby. One of the accommodation programmes is specifically LGBT focused, offering specialised services (counselling, information and protection issues) to the guests. In all its accommodation spaces Solidarity also offers protection services. Teams identify protection issues and refer them to in-house or external medical, legal or social services depending on need. In-house teams are comprised of social workers, psychologists, educators and legal experts.

The accommodation programme is expanding in Greece, with UNHCR recently announcing additional collaboration with the Municipalities of Karditsa and Larissa to set up additional places for 600 refugees. All beneficiaries of the accommodation scheme receive through the implementing partners (NGOs) cash aid assistance, social support service, such as psychosocial support, interpretation and transportation to and from the Asylum Service.

There is a notable absence of accommodation specifically designed for the extremely vulnerable (those who have either faced violence, LGBT cases, minors and single women). The

Solidarity Centre in Thessaloniki includes accommodation for such cases, focusing on women and children, with around 50 rooms available and although a few places exist among NGO run facilities there is an overall shortage of accommodation specifically designed for such purposes.

Accommodation for unaccompanied minors

A more organised structure exists for minors and vulnerable asylum applicants outside of the hotspots. The official reception system in Greece is managed by the National Centre for Social Solidarity (Εθνικό Κέντρο Κοινωνικής Αλληλεγγύης, EKKA). EKKA functions as a referral point between applicants (mainly minors and vulnerable groups) and both official and NGO-run shelters for unaccompanied minors and asylum applicants, though the focus is more on UAMs. EKKA acts as a referral partner, issuing a referral for shelters with available UAM places, but it is not responsible for the set-up of new facilities. A total of 47 accommodation hostels have been built²³ and are in operation throughout the country for unaccompanied children, which make up a vulnerable social group and a significant part of the underage refugee population, accommodating approximately 1,000 refugees, while safe zones have been created within certain Refugee Accommodation Centres (RACs). Hostels operate under the supervision of the State. Seven of these hostels belong directly to the National Centre for Social Solidarity and the others operate under the responsibility of NGOs. However, a lot of unaccompanied children still continue to live under unfavourable conditions in RACs and elsewhere and are exposed to a variety of risks.

Cash-aid programmes

The cash-aid programme is partly as a ‘complementary’ programme to the accommodation scheme, and partly an effort to link housing with integration. In December 2016, the Minister for Migration Policy announced that a monthly financial allowance of about €400 per family be distributed to refugees. The financial allowance would be offered instead of daily or weekly food provisions offered in the centres or in the accommodation flats provided to those who registered for relocation. The cash assistance programme was set up by UNHCR and NGOs in Greece in response to the absence of funding offered by the Greek government to asylum seekers. Funded by the European Commission Humanitarian Aid (ECHO) emergency assistance to Greece, various NGOs (e.g. the International Rescue Committee (IRC), Samaritan’s Purse, Mercy Corps, Solidarity Now) have set up cash assistance programmes for asylum seekers residing in the mainland and on the islands. Those eligible are asylum applicants and relocation candidates, but only those benefiting from the accommodation scheme. Thus, those in the hotspots are outside the cash assistance framework.

The cash-aid programme is an important step towards integration, since in theory it allows a level of independence to the individual but also facilitates interaction with the local community. The role of NGOs has been crucial in imple-

menting the programme that is gradually being rolled out throughout the country. Cash-aid is an alternative to the financial assistance the Greek State should be providing asylum applicants. It is also, and perhaps more importantly, a way to empower migrants as they make their first tentative steps in the society.

However, as noted by one interviewee (who requested anonymity) the programme has faced difficulties. Amidst the worst economic crisis of its recent history, and with a significant portion of the population unemployed, financial assistance to the refugees was seen as controversial. The Ministry of Migration Policy announced that the amount offered would be less than that offered to unemployed Greeks, in an effort to appease negative public sentiments. This realistically impacts the beneficiaries. The minimum is 90 euros for one person, with a maximum sum that can reach up to 330 euros for large families. The sum is usually less than what is needed to buy food, cleaning provisions, clothes and other necessities – with many struggling to survive.

Cash-aid is given to the family unit (the sum is adjusted depending on the number of family members). The family needs to choose a contact point and a card is issued for the person. Overwhelmingly, the man is the focal point, which can be problematic particularly in cases of gender-based violence in the family.

Cash-aid has become all-encompassing, including sustenance. This can be problematic depending on the location of the available accommodation. For those that are not close to a supermarket or public transport, access is the most crucial issue and there is a limit to how much NGOs can assist with organised transportation or with appropriate locations.

Medical assistance/health care

Access to health care and medical assistance are integral both in reception (first and secondary) and integration. Medical assistance was one of the few areas entirely provided by NGOs throughout the first two years of the ‘crisis’, especially emergency health care on arrival and in the camps.

There are two types of medical assistance. The first pertains to arrival and is known as medical screening and also serves to identify any emergency issues and vulnerability concerns. The second is treatment and access to health care throughout the stay of the migrant in the country.

There is a variety of medical NGOs active in Greece as well as NGOs that include provision of emergency health care assistance. Initially deployed on the islands, it became clear there was also a need for the deployment of teams along the route (e.g. as done by Women and Health Alliance (WAHA) and Médecins Sans Frontières), at Idomeni and eventually in the hotspots and camps across Greece. In the midst of the emergency, medical services were provided to all irrespective of the organisation’s focus, as noted by WAHA.

The organisation provided first aid to those stranded on the islands (until July 2017), along the route in 2015-2016 and in the mainland following the closure of the Western Balkan route. The international medical humanitarian organisation Médecins Sans Frontières similarly scaled up its operations in Europe throughout 2015, with a focus on setting up mobile responses to attend to the needs of people on the move. MSF started providing free primary health care services as well as essential items necessary for the journey and, in the summer of 2015, expanded its operations to include mental health support for people on the move.

It is important to note that on the islands, NGOs often had to provide services beyond their original mandate, precisely because healthcare requires first and foremost access. MSF expanded the scope of its activities to include transportation of people, building and ensuring the daily maintenance of shelter and hygiene facilities in all locations with deployed teams, and waste management. Thus, from mobile medical activities, MSF found itself invested in major logistical work with the purpose of improving the living conditions of patients. In addition, MSF added cultural mediators to its teams in order to facilitate better communication and provision of information for the new arrivals. ARSIS similarly noted how in some of the camps (Diavata and Vassilika) the staff often has to move people to hospitals using their own means of transport. The NGO also rents vans to transfer patients to hospitals. Transport, in fact, proved to be one of the most critical requirements for accessing health care and NGO provision proved instrumental, owing to the absence of an official strategy.

Provision of medical assistance not only on arrival but also en route was a necessity throughout 2015 and part of 2016. Once, the border closed, and reception facilities emerged on the islands and camps across the mainland, medical services also changed, and were provided mostly in set locations. At times they also served an additional purpose, particularly for those in the hotspots.

Medical screening is critical on the islands, and especially in the hotspots, because it is linked with vulnerability assessment and potential transfer to the mainland. Those identified with serious medical issues (including mental problems) are given a medical passport that allows their transfer to the camps or facilities in the mainland. As of August 2017, medical screening in the hotspots has been undertaken primarily (or in its entirety) by the Hellenic Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (KEELPNO) in partnership with the Ministry of Migration Policy. The funding is provided through the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF). In a recent discussion with a legal counsellor of an NGO (anonymity requested) the significance of medical screening was highlighted since “the withdrawal of NGOs since August means that KEELPNO has limited resources on site and there are significant delays in medical screening. As a result, asylum applicants often have their claim examined prior to medical screening”.²⁴ Concerns over the gap in the handover to KEELPNO have been raised by the NGOs. WAHA pointed out the importance of having

a medical mediator, an organisation that can function as a bridge initially between the asylum seekers and personnel in public hospitals and health care facilities.

A new law adopted in 2016 provides free access to public health services for persons without social insurance and vulnerable groups, including asylum seekers but in practice access is often difficult since it often requires the presence of interpreters, and a referral system. As noted in a recent MSF report “[Greek] hospitals are struggling to respond to the needs of both local people and migrants, mainly due to a lack of resources. As a result, people regularly face difficulties in accessing proper healthcare, especially specialised care”.²⁵

For medical assistance, access and infrastructure are needed, along with supplies and referral systems to local hospitals for critical cases. Communicable diseases, trauma related injuries and mental health problems are the most common issues facing the refugees. MSF, for example, has noted that alongside trauma related injuries, teams address also provide specialized services, such as Primary Health Care examinations (PHC), Sexual and Reproductive Health consultations (SRH), Mental Health (MH), Chronic Diseases and Victims of Torture and Violence consultations. WAHA (in partnership with ASB) offers primary health care in: Diavata, Loutra Volvis, Mouries, Derveni, Nea Redestos-Vassilika, Ktima Iraklis, and in the Four Seasons Hotel in Trilofos, Thessaloniki – all camp/accommodation spaces in the mainland.

A cooperation model emerged across various camps, enabling NGOs to provide medical services. A good example is that between WAHA-ASB & ARSIS, with ASB setting up the camp infrastructure, WAHA providing medical services and ARSIS care and protection for UAMs. In some camps, WAHA shares the medical services with other NGOs, enabling a more flexible deployment of resources. Beyond emergency health care, regular services such as breastfeeding sessions (e.g. WAHA in partnership with Save the Children) and vaccinations are offered.

Though the medical situation of most refugees has improved, largely due to the fast deployment and commitment of NGOs on the ground, there are concerns about the future.

The funding for health care provided by the European Commission (DG ECHO) was largely assigned to non-governmental organisations providing primary healthcare in urban areas or in camps and reception centres. According to a recent Chatham House research “Twenty-four million euros (\$27,2 million) were awarded by the E.U. emergency support instrument (as of January 2017) to NGOs for emergency primary healthcare. From the \$202 million awarded to the Greek government, \$27 million has been given to the Health Ministry by the Commission to cover ‘comprehensive emergency health response’ for refugees.” As a result, the ministry hired a number of medical staff and cultural mediators on short-term contracts to support existing public health

structures, but predominantly to provide primary healthcare in camps – similar to the type of work NGOs have been doing since 2015”.²⁶

Most NGOs, following the stabilisation in the figure of migrants in the country, are reducing their presence in Greece, and as the accommodation programme rolls out across the country, the population in the camps in the mainland is expected to decrease to a minimum. As NGOs cut back on their staff, medical teams are also reduced, while the situation particularly on the islands quickly deteriorates.²⁷

For those in apartments pending relocation or undertaking their first steps towards integration, further difficulties exist. Since April 2016, access to healthcare is no longer linked to employment-based health insurance, which has been a positive step that requires issuing a social security number.

The difficulty lies in acquiring that social security number, or in many cases communicating with the doctor and the nurses since there are no provisions in most hospitals for additional specialised staff to address the needs of a migrant population.

Women and minors face additional challenges. Lack of adapted medical care, lack of cultural approach and lack of specialised services (family planning, abortion) were noted by MSF, as particularly problematic for women. Melissa Network, an organisation exclusively focused on women,²⁸ further noted that limited access to health care and a significant lack of shelters, especially for unaccompanied women are still observed as well as a lack of sufficient psycho-social support programmes.

PORT OF PIRAEUS, ATHENS, MARCH 2016



Overall, there is an acknowledgement that the situation has improved significantly in comparison to 2015. As WAHA pointed out, the population is no longer on the move and thus can be treated and monitored.

Different levels of access and support have been highlighted by NGOs depending on one's location; from the hotspots, to accommodation on the islands, to the mainland, access depends on numbers, deployed staff and overall conditions. In other words, like asylum, accommodation and everything else, medical care on the islands, and in the hotspots particularly, differs than that on offer in the mainland.

Access to the labour market

Integration largely begins with access to the labour market. Yet, according to the Melissa Network "the major obstacle to achieving the goal of integration is limited access to structured services and employment". This is repeatedly stressed by those involved with migrants in Greece.

According to national legislation, which was amended in 2016, asylum seekers have access to the labour market from the moment an asylum application is formally lodged and the asylum seeker's card is issued.²⁹ They can seek employment, self-employ or employ others in a system that in theory remains open to them so long as they have legalised their stay in the country – even temporarily.

There have been various initiatives undertaken to assist asylum seekers in accessing the labour market. ARSIS for example offers information sessions in camps regarding the right to issue an AMKA (Social Security Number) and an AFM (Tax Number), which are needed for employment. The NGO noted that the Afghans are particularly keen on issuing both numbers, and that there is an interest from women in accessing the labour market, however the problem is many lack basic skills relevant to the current economy. On the other hand, women tend to arrive with cooking skills and experience, which are left underutilised.³⁰

Despite the legal framework in place, issuing the AMKA and AFM remains an extremely bureaucratic and difficult process. In most cases, the language barrier hinders any communication between civil servants and migrants. Many of those responsible for the process are unaware of the changes in the law and refuse to proceed with registration. As noted by NGOs, in those cases a lawyer or social worker accompany the migrant to facilitate the process.

Solidary Now is one of the NGOs increasingly focused on offering assistance to refugees interesting in accessing the labour market. It does so through its Solidarity Centres.³¹ Currently Solidarity Centres exist in Athens and Thessaloniki. In Athens the centre includes social services that refer individuals in turn to the appropriate service (health, legal, etc). The centre offers psychological support to individuals with a separate department for women and children, a daycare centre (in cooperation with the Network for the Rights of

the Child) as well as a space hosting a representative of the asylum service for the vulnerable cases and minors. In Thessaloniki, the Centre is similar but focuses more on integration, by assisting in the issuing of the AMKA, finding appropriate accommodation and employment places where possible.

The centres have been successful not only in acting as focal points for information and communication but also in providing a safe space for migrants to meet, interact and receive assistance.

In practice, though, it is difficult to speak of access to the labour market for migrants. The high unemployment rates are a structural obstacle that affects migrants and Greeks alike, with further obstacles created by language barriers (most Greek employers require good knowledge of the language) and/or the necessity for specific skills. A further barrier is the lack of documentation proving the acquisition of higher education and/or specific skills. The latter is gradually being addressed through the initiative of the Council of Europe Recognition of Qualifications held by Refugees pilot programme.³² Though the programme seeks to enable transfer of credentials, its practical usefulness lies in the labour market since the existence of documents proving qualifications can facilitate access to employment. Greece is the only country which has agreed to accept the assessment as of September 2017, with 54 refugees living in camps in Attica having benefited from the programme. Twenty more are expected to participate in September 2017.

Education

Education is one area where the role of NGOs is relatively regulated in Greece. Education became an issue of concern, following the closure of the Western Balkan route and the EU-Turkey Statement in the spring of 2016. The question of integration but also of positive engagement of the stranded population that would either remain in Greece or be relocated within the next two years arose, specifically as regards minors and the loss of education many had suffered. However, it is important to recognise that formal education is the one area where the involvement of NGOs is limited by default, precisely since access to education, the school curriculum etc. are the sole competence of the State. Nonetheless, the contribution of NGOs (and civil society) has been significant in assisting and often compensating for the absence of formal planning.

As of the spring of 2016, when the Ministry of Education Research and Religious Affairs officially assumed the responsibility for the formal education of refugees, "all NGOs involved in the field of creative engagement and education were invited to be certified by the IEP/Ministry of Education Research and Religious Affairs, by submitting proposals of specific programmes to a single registry. At the same, the NGOs were informed about the terms of being active in the field of formal and informal education".³³

The report by the Scientific Committee notes that there have been problems and questions raised as to the role of NGOs in the field of education and especially creative engagement. It is unclear whether there should be an evaluation of the NGOs that offer non formal education activities, such as art classes. The report further notes that there have been cases where educational activities are offered especially in the camps, without Ministerial approval. Interestingly, the Committee praises the work of IOM, which undertook the transport of students from and to schools but also provided equipment for primary school children. UNICEF and UNHCR have also provided equipment for schools that receive refugee children, with UNICEF also having supported the vaccination programme.

The Melissa Network in response to a request by the author noted that although “school enrolment is mandatory for all refugees until the age of 15, access to education is rather difficult for girls aged 14-18, firstly because they were excluded from the mainstream educational system during the past year but also due to the language barrier. Various NGOs and volunteers offer language classes for migrant and refugees. However, a more coordinated state-initiated initiative should be introduced”. In fact, accessing school between the ages of 14-18 does not appear to be a problem only for girls, but also for boys, that face similar difficulties in terms of language but also extensive absence from the education system.

Access to schools received a mixed response from Greek society. In some cases, the local society was present in full force to support the integration of children in the schools, while in others local council meetings were held where parents voiced objections to the presence of refugee children in the classroom. This was partly due to the failure of the Ministry to provide advance warning and information to the community on the number of children, structure of schooling and guarantees on vaccination. The scheme initially was piloted for 2,000 minors around the country.

The project was implemented in two stages: first, in the summer of 2016, with artistic actions in the reception centres of the refugees. And, secondly, during the school year 2016-2017 in the schools of the territory of Greece aiming to integrate refugees into the education system starting with afternoon lessons for four hours daily in Greek, English, mathematics, artistic activities etc. Minors attended afternoon classes only. The absence of language training for teachers however and the limited availability of interpreters have made implementation challenging.

NGOs have been instrumental in referring children to schools both from camps and accommodation centres. They have provided families with information and in many cases also assisted with the initial transport of the children to the schools (accompanied by a social worker, interpreter, etc.). In addition, in the summer of 2017, at least two organisations – the NGO METAdrasis³⁴ and the NGO CIVIS PLUS – initiated programmes in primary schools of the Municipality of Athens under the Open Schools programme sponsored by the

Stavros Niarchos Foundation and implemented actions funded by various institutions for child immigrants and refugees and for their parents, such as Greek, mathematics, English, computer science, gymnastics and intercultural activities, in line with the Ministry of Education’s programmes.³⁵

Conclusions

Is it possible to speak of a clear pathway from arrival to integration in Greece? The present article serves more of a starting point in a complex discussion, however it is clear at present that integration is a prospect on the distant horizon and it is unclear how many will achieve it.

Reception is gradually being organised, though significant problems remain. Of concern is the coming winter, mainly for the hotspots on the islands. It is unclear what will happen to those still stranded on the islands, whether they will be moved in the mainland to new centres or remain in the hotspots. The accommodation scheme is extremely complex, since it links with referrals to hospitals, legal aid, psychological support, vulnerability assessment and additional services that are needed for training, access to education for minors, and special provisions for women and LGBT persons. Transport and interpretation, the continuation of the cash-aid programme or potential alternatives in place, education for minors between 14-18 years old, are all issues that remain to be resolved to some extent, particularly in relation to funding. The new role of KEELPNO in providing health care to migrants remains to be seen, since success will depend on the speed of hires (nurses, doctors), availability of equipment and overall management coordination of medical care.

Minors and women remain the two most vulnerable groups and the least addressed in the context of the ‘crisis’. This is also changing, largely through initiatives undertaken by NGOs. Two examples, though not the only ones, worth mentioning are the Blue Dot scheme by Solidarity Now and UNICEF, and the Melissa Network’s Alef programme, implemented with the support of Mercy Corps and the Municipality of Athens that functions as a pathway for refugee women and girls. It is based on a holistic approach to integration, providing a full cycle of activities, from literacy (Greek and English), psychosocial support, skills and creativity, self-care and childcare, information and advocacy. The programme’s popularity has led to the formation of long waiting lists; as a result there is a certain selection process for beneficiaries. Priority is given to young women aged 16-24 due to the fact that they cannot get enrolled in the public school system. Single mothers and ladies referred from other NGOs and in need for psychosocial support are also prioritised. From literacy to psychosocial support, skills and creativity, self-care and childcare, information and advocacy, the Alef programme is one of the few offering an all-encompassing approach to integration.



TWO YOUNG MIGRANTS DRAWING ON A WALL, PORT OF PIRAEUS, ATHENS, MARCH 2016



The Blue Dot Refugee Centre by Solidarity Now, a spin-off in a way of the Solidarity Centres in place, focuses exclusively on refugees and offers education for kids (English and Greek) as well as for adults, cultural orientation classes, tours of the city, interpretation services as well as communication with the communities through an officer responsible for making activities and services known to refugees housed through the accommodation scheme. The focus increasingly is also on employability with funding provided through UNICEF.

The main question and concern is how do migrants access the services on offer. A significant number receive information through their own networks, but also through organisations that offer referrals alongside advocacy and protection (e.g. UNHCR, IOM, etc.). Information is accessible in the camps through on-point staff by most NGOs. Regarding the official State services, information in theory is accessible on arrival. Accommodation for minors is handled by EKKA (see discussion on accommodation) and screening officers on arrival are responsible for identifying vulnerable cases and referring them to the relevant psychosocial support staff in the hotspots. Those who wish to apply for asylum are referred to the staff on the site of the asylum service and EASO.

However, as discussed in the present article, there is a gap between what the law prescribes and what is on offer. The reality on the ground is that Greece remains heavily dependent on external funding for reception and with the gradual scale back of NGOs it is unclear who will provide the variety of services currently offered. The discussion on integration is also in its infancy, with the exact number of those present in the country unknown and with a lack of planning if relocation does not complete on time for Greece. For the newly arrived migrants the structured barriers are many. Being stranded on the islands, waiting for a long period of time for asylum at first instance and on appeal, the prospect (and threat) of return to Turkey, waiting for a vulnerability assessment that may lead to some being transferred in the mainland, being allocated an accommodation site which can range from a camp to an apartment and these are just the first steps. To an extent, the journey does not end on arrival but starts anew in a country that has yet to develop a coherent strategy for the population currently in place and those who will likely arrive in the near future.



1. Research Fellow, Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy
2. Throughout the text the term 'migrant' instead of 'refugee' will be used, acknowledging the complexity of the journey.
3. In fact Greece has not been in a state of emergency since January 2017 but the funding was meant to conclude in July 2017.
4. The author would like to thank ARSIS, WAHA, MSF, Solidarity Now and Melissa Network for their willingness to share insights and experience regarding the reception and integration of refugees. Analysis and comments remain the author's responsibility.
5. For example, on the island of Lesbos, the first refugee camp – KARA TEPE – was set up by the municipality and with assistance from UNHCR. The camp accommodated overwhelmingly Syrians and Iraqis. On the other hand, migrants from Pakistan, Afghanistan and other nationalities were excluded. [Authors' notes from site visit to Kara Tepe, in March 2016].
6. See Squire, V. et al (2017).
7. UNHCR.2016. Breakdown of men-children-women among sea arrivals in Greece, available at: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/46876>. Data is partial, provided by authorities and should be treated as an indication rather than final.
8. For example the presence of female police officers, interviewers and interpreters in certain islands was severely limited.
9. The kit was adapted to seasonal needs; for instance the winter kit contained a warmer blanket, a rain poncho and socks, instead of a cap and sun-cream.
10. L4375/2016, in English available via www.refworld.org/docid/573ad4cb4.html (unofficial translation).
11. For a discussion on the hotspots see Dimitriadi,A (2017). Governing irregular migration at the margins of Europe: The case of hotspots on the Greek islands. *Etnografia e ricerca qualitativa*, 1:76-95.
12. Those in the hotspots, subject to the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement are excluded from the financial allowance. Those, who are in the islands housed in accommodation facilities ran by NGOs/UNHCR are eligible for participation.
13. The figure includes the hotspots and detention facilities on the islands.
14. Situated in Athens, hosting as of July 2017 2038 persons (capacity for 2500).
15. Including InterSoS, Refugee Support, ASB, Oxfam (for children), DRC, IFRC (the list is not exhaustive and refers only to site management).0
16. Centres open and close depending on conditions, funding and population in need. Thus, information should be treated as valid as of 10 September 2017.
17. www.kathimerini.gr/929732/article/epikairothta/ellada/ektos-domwn-filo3enias-1650-asynodeyta-paidia.
18. PACE (21 June 2016). Refugees in Greece: challenges and risks – A European responsibility, Resolution 2118, available at: <http://bit.ly/2l2xVqm>
19. The figure indicates available beds.
20. Kara Tepe in Lesbos, Souda in Chios, Pikpa in Leros.



WOMAN IN CAMP IN CHIOS, AUGUST 2010

21. UNHCR, Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan for Europe – Eastern Mediterranean and Western Balkans Route, January-December 2016, January 2016, 50. Recital 12 Commission Recommendation C(2016) 8525 on the resumption of transfers to Greece under Regulation (EU) No 604/2013, 8 December 2016.
22. UNHCR (June 2017) Fact Sheet Greece, available at: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/58720>.
23. Ombudsman for Children's Report says 54 such units are in operation. *Monitoring mechanism for the rights of children moving to Greece* (July - December 2016), Ombudsman/Ombudsman for Children and UNICEF, p. 86 available at: www.synigoros.gr/resources/20170420-ekthesi-mixanismo--2.pdf. See also Scientific Committee of the Ministry of Education Research and Religious Affairs (April 2017) *Refugee Education Project Assessment Report on the Integration Project of Refugee Children in Education*, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/librarydoc/refugee-education-project-assessment-and-proposals>.
24. Interview with legal counsellor of NGO, 5/9/2017 Athens, anonymity requested.
25. MSF (20 October 2016). Greece in 2016: *Vulnerable People Left Behind*, available at: <http://bit.ly/2kPFBG1>.
26. Capsaskis, Lenio (July 5, 2017) *Integrating Refugees Can Strengthen Greece's Health System*, Refugees Deeply, available at: www.newsdeeply.com/refugees/community/2017/07/05/integrating-refugees-can-strengthen-greeces-health-system
27. See Human Rights Watch (July 2017) *EU/Greece: Asylum Seekers' Silent Mental Health Crisis-Identify Those Most at Risk; Ensure Fair Hearings*, available at: www.hrw.org/news/2017/07/12/eu/greece-asylum-seekers-silent-mental-health-crisis ; see also
28. Melissa is a network for migrant and refugee women living in Greece. It aims to promote empowerment and active citizenship, and to build a bridge of communication with the host society.
29. This in practice excludes those who pre-register but have yet to formally submit a claim and receive the asylum seeker's card.
30. An interesting example is the recent Refugee Food Festival, organised by UNHCR in collaboration with restaurants around Athens in the framework of World Refugee Day. Of all the 'refugee chefs', only one participant was female.
31. The centres are open to everyone, Greek citizens and migrants irrespective of legal status.
32. The document gives information on their education qualifications and presents information on the refugee's work experience and language proficiency.
33. Scientific Committee of the Ministry of Education Research and Religious Affairs (April 2017) *Refugee Education Project Assessment Report on the Integration Project of Refugee Children in Education*, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/librarydoc/refugee-education-project-assessment-and-proposals>.
34. The organisation operates mainly in the sectors of interpretation services and the protection of unaccompanied children. It offers specially trained interpreters in 33 languages and dialects to provide vital communication with refugees, legal support, and certification of victims of torture. It also escorts unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) from border detention centres to appropriate accommodation facilities throughout Greece and operates Transit Accommodation Facilities for UASC.
35. In July 2017, the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy held a workshop on assessing the education program for minors in Greece. The conclusions, policy recommendations and analysis of stakeholders present can be found in the report due for release in autumn 2017 (available only in Greek). The draft report was kindly given for the purpose of the present document. The author would like to thank Marina Nikolova and Dia Anagnostou for providing the advanced draft.

LEFT TO OURSELVES – FACTS AND STORIES FROM ITALY’S RECEPTION SYSTEM FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES

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Italy's reception system for asylum seekers and refugees has been put under great strain in 2016 and 2017 due to the record arrivals recorded up to July 2017, and controversial reforms, like the Minniti-Orlandi Legislative Decree on Immigration and Asylum (L.D. 13/2017). The decree aims to simplify judicial procedures and lighten the burden on the reception system, but it leaves those seeking international protection with no chance to appeal the rejection of their asylum claims and no access to extensive protection provisions. Against this background, the inadequacies of Italy's first reception system for asylum seekers, in particular, need to be investigated taking into account both the institutional model of governance that planned and regulated it, as well as the role played by civil society organisations operating as managing bodies in shaping it.

This paper aims to shed light on the dysfunctionalities of the protection and assistance system in Italy, by presenting and discussing the critical situations faced daily by asylum seekers who have arrived in Italy after crossing the Mediterranean from Libya, and now live in temporary reception centres funded and coordinated by the Italian Government. These women, men and children, who experienced mistreatment and abuse on their journey to Europe, are often subjected once they arrive in Italy's temporary reception centres to an inadequate response, which jeopardises their chance of inclusion in Italy. This analysis will focus on the following research objectives: assessing the procedures and challenges of the first reception of refugees and asylum seekers, as well as the involvement of NGOs acting as managing bodies in the first reception of migrants; collecting some best practices and assessing their potential transferability.

As country in the middle of the Mediterranean, Italy represents an obvious maritime gateway for forced migrants who intend to continue on their journey to ask for protection, find a job in a Northern European country and reunite with relatives. Consequently, by accident of geography, Italy has played a disproportionate role in the on-going European migration crisis, receiving more than 438,916 irregular arrivals via the Mediterranean between 2015 and September 2017.⁴²

Data from the Italian Interior Ministry³ concerning the migrants who landed in Italy between January and March 2017 clearly shows the size of the increase compared to the previous years: 24,280 migrants landed in Italy in the first trimester of 2017 compared to the 18,777 who disembarked in the same period in 2016. While recent figures have shown that the flow of migrants from Libya to Italy has decreased (about a fifth of the number during each of the equivalent periods of 2014, 2015 and 2016, according to the Italian Interior Ministry) no one can prove that this dip is linked to the on-going attempts by Italy and the EU to improve the capability of the Libyan Coast Guard to manage the migration flow and to discourage many NGOs from conducting search and rescue operations off the Libyan coast.

In the meantime, Libya remains a trap for hundreds of thousands of forced migrants who wait to leave at the hands of human traffickers and smugglers, who continue to prosper undisturbed in the power vacuum created by the overthrow of Muammar Qaddafi. For migrants stranded in lawless Libya the conditions are harsh and the abuses constant, especially for the sub-Saharan migrant men, women and children.

For those people, few legal paths for migration exist, so thousands of them pay smugglers to cross the Mediterranean and reach Italy. According to the Italian Ministry of Interior, they come from Nigeria (first declared nationality in 2017, around 17% of the total), followed by Guinea (9%), Bangladesh (9%), Ivory Coast (8%), Mali (6%), Eritrea (6%), Gambia (5%), Senegal (5%).

Behind the numbers, however, there are individual tragic stories. Refugees and migrants in Libya have often suffered countless human rights violations including, among others, "arbitrary detention, torture, other ill-treatment, unlawful killings and sexual exploitation".⁴



AFRICAN AND SYRIAN MIGRANTS ARRIVING IN LAMPEDUSA, SEPTEMBER 2013

“I have faced all the problems: theft, bad treatment, discrimination, exploitation (and the) rape attempt of my wife and daughters”,⁵ a native Rwanda migrant told the United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees, one among scores of voices in a study on mixed migration trends through Libya,⁶ which examines the rising flow of refugees passing through the North African country, and the multiple hazards they

face. The risks along the way continue in the Mediterranean: according to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM)⁷ from January to September 2017, 2,654 migrants died or were missing after setting off from the northern coast of Libya, and many others are in Libya waiting to cross. Deplorably, as Pinelli notes, “institutional silence shrouds what happens after the landing on Italian shores, and the



The Italian reception system: the legal framework

In such a composite, unstable migratory framework, the so-called reception machine has required a growing effort from the Italian government and the various organisations working in the reception system to adapt the existing system to an increasingly challenging phenomenon. Today,⁹ the reception system for migrants is the result of multiple reforms and legislative acts issued to cope with constantly increasing migratory mobility. The latest Act, Legislative Decree 142/2015¹⁰ has introduced new regulations, partially modifying the previous reception system¹¹ and dividing it into the following phases.

First aid and assistance (CPAs, CPSAs, Regional Hubs and Hotspots)

This phase goes before reception per se, and consists of first aid to migrants in the landing places. In the current legal framework, these tasks continue to be carried out in part in the First Reception Centres (CPAs) and in the First Aid and Reception Centres (CPSAs), set up at the time of the migration emergency in Apulia in 1995. Since 2015, however, after the entry into force of the European Commission's European Agenda on Migration,¹² the Italian government has redefined this phase of reception, introducing four hotspots in Lampedusa, Pozzallo, Taranto and Trapani¹³ (whose activities officially started between September 2015 and February 2016) and 12 regional hubs.

Theoretically speaking, according to the European Agenda on Migration, the Italian reception system starts in the hotspots where new arrivals should receive first screening, and should be pre-identified, fingerprinted, and informed about their current condition as irregular immigrants and the possibility to apply for international protection. After this procedure migrants should be transferred to the regional hub, described by the Ministry of Interior (Moi) as "open structures to be used in the first reception phase, destined to host third-country nationals – already registered and subjected to photo-signalling procedures – who must complete the so-called C3 model for the formalisation of the international protection request".¹⁴ In practice, however, the advent of the hotspot and the regional hubs did not lead to the establishment of new reception facilities, they operated instead from existing ones.

courses asylum seekers follow within the bureaucratic and assistance apparatuses are overshadowed by official data and state regulations".⁸

What exactly happens to the migrants who were able to survive their journey? And how is Italy responding to their huge need for reception facilities?



MIGRANTS DISEMBARKING IN POZZALLO, NOVEMBER 2015

L.D. 142/2015, furthermore, does not provide a legal framework for the operations carried out in the regional hub or hotspots, stating only (art. 8) that the first rescue and assistance operations take place in the centres regulated by the L 563/1995 – the so-called Apulia Law – which, though inappropriately, is considered to govern the first aid and reception centres (CPSAs) present at the main places of disembarkation. Additionally, EU documents define the hotspot

concept both as an “approach” and as “an area”.¹⁵ This “lack of a precise regulatory framework”¹⁶ is resulting in serious violations of the fundamental rights of asylum seekers reaching Italian shores, since the activities that take place in those centres are not regulated by any Italian or European law and are “often in clear contrast to the provisions of laws concerning international protection and the infringement of personal freedom”¹⁷.



After having documented that the hotspots approach in Italy has primarily served as a measure to better control migration and ensure Italy's compliance with the fingerprinting requirement, a recent report from the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE)¹⁸ has illustrated why the implementation of the hotspot approach raises many shortcomings. First of all, according to Mol's data,¹⁹ the majority of the arrivals in Italy continue to take place far from the hotspots; secondly,

while, according to the Mol Standard Operating Procedures, migrants should stay in the hotspots "as short a time as possible",²⁰ in practice they are accommodated for days or weeks facing serious fundamental rights violations in the implementation of identification and registration practices, including "impeded access to the asylum process through pre-identification measures conducted by the police immediately after disembarkation, without sufficient information provided; differentiated treatment and returns based on nationality; insufficient reception capacity, especially regarding vulnerable groups requiring specialised shelter".²¹

Similar problems affect the implementation of the regional hubs. Currently, the twelve working regional hubs operate to accommodate asylum seekers and people in need of protection under the EU relocation programme. Those who, although not belonging to one of the eligible nationalities, express the intention of submitting an application for international protection are transferred to one of the regional centres throughout the country, depending on the availability of places and the reception conditions of the various centres. However, since the number of relocations carried out is low, the turnover in such centres is also low. "For example, the CARA (Reception Centre for Asylum-Seekers) in Mineo (Catania, Sicily), with a capacity of up to 4,000 people, has been progressively used as a regional hub. Given its capacity, it can be used for three different aims (hotspot, regional hub and reception centre for asylum seekers)".²² Looking at these shortcomings, the Italian Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry on reception, identification and expulsion centres has observed that the absence of implementing rules "does not contribute to clarifying the doubt about the characteristics of the so-called regional hubs and whether they coincide with the first reception facilities established by Article 9 of the DL 172/2015".²³ Moreover, the definition "regional hub" appears only in the Italian Roadmap published by the Mol on 28 September 2015 and based on Article 8 of Council Decision (EU) 2015/1523 of 22 September 2015 – a text devoid of normative value – according to which "the first reception system is composed of structures belonging to former government centres (CARA/CDA and CPSA), which are currently being reconfigured as regional hubs".²⁴

First reception

This phase is implemented in the Governmental Centres of First Reception (CPAs) established by L.D. 142/2015 replacing the existing reception centres for asylum seekers (CARAs) and the Reception Centres (CDAs), established for migrant's identification and application submissions. The entry of the asylum seeker in these facilities is overseen by the Prefect in consultation with the Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration of the Ministry of the Interior. According to LD 142/2015, first reception is guaranteed in the governmental accommodation centres to carry out the necessary operations to define the legal position of the foreigner concerned. Upon arrival, in case of unavailability of places in the CPAs, asylum seekers may be also placed in Temporary Reception Centres (CAS), funded by Prefectures. LD 142/2015 clarifies

that the CAS have the same role as first reception centres. Indeed, accommodation in temporary reception structures should be limited to the time strictly necessary for the transfer of the applicant in the first or second reception centres. However, the law does not specify any time limit for the stay of asylum seekers in these centres, and only provides that applicants stay “as long as necessary” to complete procedures related to their “identification”,²⁵ and be transferred to the second-line reception provided through the system for the protection of asylum seekers and refugees (SPRAR), managed by local municipalities. According to the law, governmental first reception centres generally offer basic services compared to those provided by second-line reception structures. First reception centres are in fact very big collective centres offering basic services such as “food, accommodation, clothing, basic information services including legal services, first aid and emergency treatments”²⁶ for large numbers of migrants.

Second-line reception

This phase is provided under the System for the Protection of Asylum Seekers and Refugees (SPRAR). The SPRAR, established in 2002 by L. 189/2002, is a publicly funded network of local authorities and NGOs that accommodates asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection. It is formed by small reception structures where assistance and integration services are provided. In contrast to the large-scale buildings provided in the first line reception, the SPRAR is composed of over 649 smaller-scale decentralised projects as of January 2017.²⁷ According to the Ministry of Interior Decree of 10 August 2016, the centres ensure interpretation and linguistic-cultural mediation services, legal referral, teaching of the Italian language and access to schools for minors, health assistance, socio-psychological support in particular to vulnerable persons, vocational trainings, counselling on the services available at local level to allow integration locally, information on assisted voluntary return programmes, as well as on recreational, sport and cultural activities. Persons hosted in a SPRAR centre receive daily pocket money, which varies depending on the individual project from 1.50 to 3 euros with up to 20% reduction for families exceeding two people.

Living in the first reception facilities: the institutionalisation of temporariness

After the entry into force of LD 142/2015, all the former CARA and CDA have been converted into governmental first reception centres (CPSAs), but nothing has substantially changed compared to the past. The reorganisation of the reception system which started with L.D. 142/2015 failed to take off. The critical node is exactly the same as before: the shortage of places in the SPRAR system. While the latest National Reception Plan²⁸ approved in 2016, envisages the phasing out of the CAS, with a view to the consolidation of a homogeneous reception system modelled on the SPRAR network, the reality to date is that this model represents only a residual part of the Italian reception system.

Latest figures from the Italian Interior Ministry²⁹ show in this sense a highly complex reality where, at the end of March 2017, there were, overall, 176,532 migrants in the reception centres. Of these, only 23,867 people were residing in the SPRAR structures, while as many as 152,656 asylum seekers were residing in the first line reception structures (First Reception Centres, Hotspot and Temporary Structures). In the first line reception CAS host the biggest share of asylum



seekers, with a total of 137,855, more than twice as many as last year, and about 78% of the total population covered by the Italian reception system. The disproportion is caused mainly by the scarce local coverage of the SPRAR system: as of 23 January 2016, only 552 out of 7,978 municipalities (7% of the total) had agreed to participate in the SPRAR, providing 25,934 places. Many forced migrants met and interviewed during this time have reported systematic difficulties in

accessing the second reception line due to the inadequate development of the SPRAR project. That has resulted in the regular overcrowding of the Governmental Centres of First Reception which has been met with short terms measures like the indiscriminate opening of CAS centres structurally unsuited to solving the chronic state of emergency of the Italian reception system. In this context, not surprisingly, just like before L.D. 142/2015 came into force, overpopulated



IN POZZALLO, SEPTEMBER 2015

CPSAs and CAS continue to host asylum seekers even after the completion of the entire asylum procedure.

The paradox of the Italian reception system is that the temporary reception line (CAS), currently absorbing almost 80% of total asylum seekers landing in Italy, is widely recognised as a colossal failure. “We are well aware” – the annual report on International Protection in Italy states – “that though it provided an immediate answer to a need, the quality of that answer was not always satisfactory. The use of hotels and other hospitality structures, for tourist purposes therefore different to those foreseen to host asylum seekers, has gone from being extraordinary to being ordinary”.³⁰ In the same vein, the head of the Department for *Civil Liberties and Immigration* of the Italian Mol has stressed how the necessary increase of places in the SPRAR network, currently under discussion with ANCI (the National Association of the Italian Municipalities) should hopefully lead to a reduction in “the presence of CAS, which are very often an issue of concern, difficulty and sometimes abuse”.³¹

Institutional sources, journalistic inquiries, and the monitoring done by organisations working to support migrants, have widely demonstrated what the abuses consist of: improvised, overcrowded and isolated structures, often located far from the main urban centres with few possibilities to interact with local contexts; unqualified, untrained and underpaid staff; poor-quality food and lack of psychological, sanitary and legal assistance.³² An additional serious concern is the lack of transparency. Even though asylum seekers hosted in the CAS are the majority of those present in the entire reception chain, there is no public mapping of these centres, and no clear and accessible information about managing bodies, economic conventions, and standards for the provision of services provided by the conventions and tender specifications issued by the Prefectures. Given this opacity, not surprisingly, in recent years, centres all over Italy have been shut for fraud or misuse of public money, showing insufficient government oversight. In the Rome-based Mafia Capitale investigation, for instance, managers of a company that secured lucrative public bids to provide services for reception centres are currently standing trial.³³

Overall, governmental monitoring generally concerns the CAS’ structural integrity and the checklist of basic items, such as if they have the adequate number of beds and functioning bathrooms. The obvious shortcoming of this approach is well described by an activist of Borderline Sicilia, an Italian NGO: “They have a place to eat, a place to sleep, but they don’t have ways to enter society, to find work, or learn new skills. This creates depression and boredom in many centres, where migrants have little to do with their time, aside from watching TV or surfing the internet. Eventually, we see them take jobs in the black market, often in agriculture, where they become part of exploitative networks”.³⁴ With no programmes and interventions for fruitful integration, such as Italian language classes or vocational courses, and with no need to report back to the authorities, many centres furnish only basic necessities for day-to-day existence.



The abuses experienced by the asylum seekers living in this kind of limbo have been extensively described by the inquiries conducted by many NGOs and media who have played a fundamental role in shedding light on the dark side of migrant reception in Italy in the recent years. Their reports denounce a generally inadequate situation, where the reception of asylum seekers is often left in the hands



AT THE PORT OF POZZALLO , SEPTEMBER 2015

of managing bodies lacking the necessary skills and, in the worst cases, only interested in profits.

Run by different entities like cooperatives, associations or private bodies, each governmental centre – especially due to the absence of an effective government-led monitoring system – relies mainly on the competences, expertise, and organi-

sational attitude of the managing body team. That implies, in practice, that first accommodation centres do not offer the same reception services. Additionally, as L.D. 142/2015 does not provide a definition of “adequate standard of living and subsistence”, first line reception centres – unlike the SPRAR that offers the so-called “integrated accommodation” – have only to satisfy a basic level of reception not centred on the

asylum seekers' individual needs. In these structures violations are recurrent and migrants' complaints often remain unaddressed. Reports published throughout 2016 by civil society organisations such as Doctors for Human Rights (MEDU),³⁵ NAGA,³⁶ Lunaria,³⁷ and LasciateCIEntrare together with Libera and Cittalia,³⁸ have documented abuses throughout Italy, from Sicily to Lombardy passing through Rome.

The majority of the CAS assessed in these reports are located in old and crumbling properties such as closed hotels or abandoned farmhouses. In Sardinia, a region in which the number of CAS increased by 400% last year, dismantled tourist facilities have been clumsily transformed in temporary shelters. An investigation has listed them: "from four-star hotels to hotels at auction, from the holiday farm that struggled to make ends meet to the bed and breakfast that only worked during the summer. However, in the long list there are also multifunctional facilities (like restaurants and sports facilities), which after a short period of glory have experienced a rapid decline. Then the nightclubs: realms of fun in the 80s and 90s, then abandoned. Now they invent a new life".³⁹ If the key government principle of hosting reception services for third parties remains that of the lower cost, it is unavoidable that managing bodies are induced to adopt economies of scale. "From the way in which the system for granting services is conceived, managing bodies are forced to compete downwards to maximise the ordinary maintenance of structures and the labour costs of social workers. That translates easily into poor material reception conditions and scarce or no integration services for asylum seekers".⁴⁰

The inspections of the temporary structures by the Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry on migrant centres confirmed that the CAS' shortcomings derive also from the temporary nature of the services provided. Often, calls for tenders restrict the reception service to a few months, and this results in a generalised struggle to deliver services in accordance with acceptable quality standards. This precariousness affects both asylum seekers and staff working in the structures, whose employment contracts often do not exceed three months.⁴¹ This obviously affects the recruitment of human resources. The owners hire staff or work themselves, getting 35 euros a day per adult and 45 euros a day for each minor they accommodate. That money must also cover the daily allowance of 2.50 euros in pocket money for the asylum seekers, and daily expenses. However, in these structures often unskilled staff work with no foreign language skills and no knowledge of the international protection legal framework.

Similar situations were recorded in Sarno (Salerno), in the CAS located in Feroleto (Calabria), where an investigation led by a consortium of civil society organisations found no staff were on duty and no Italian language course was provided for asylum seekers. Some managing bodies have just one cultural mediator/operator for the entire structure who oversees multiple tasks: cultural mediation, legal support, food distribution and management of conflict among the migrants.⁴² The dissatisfaction of the operators working in

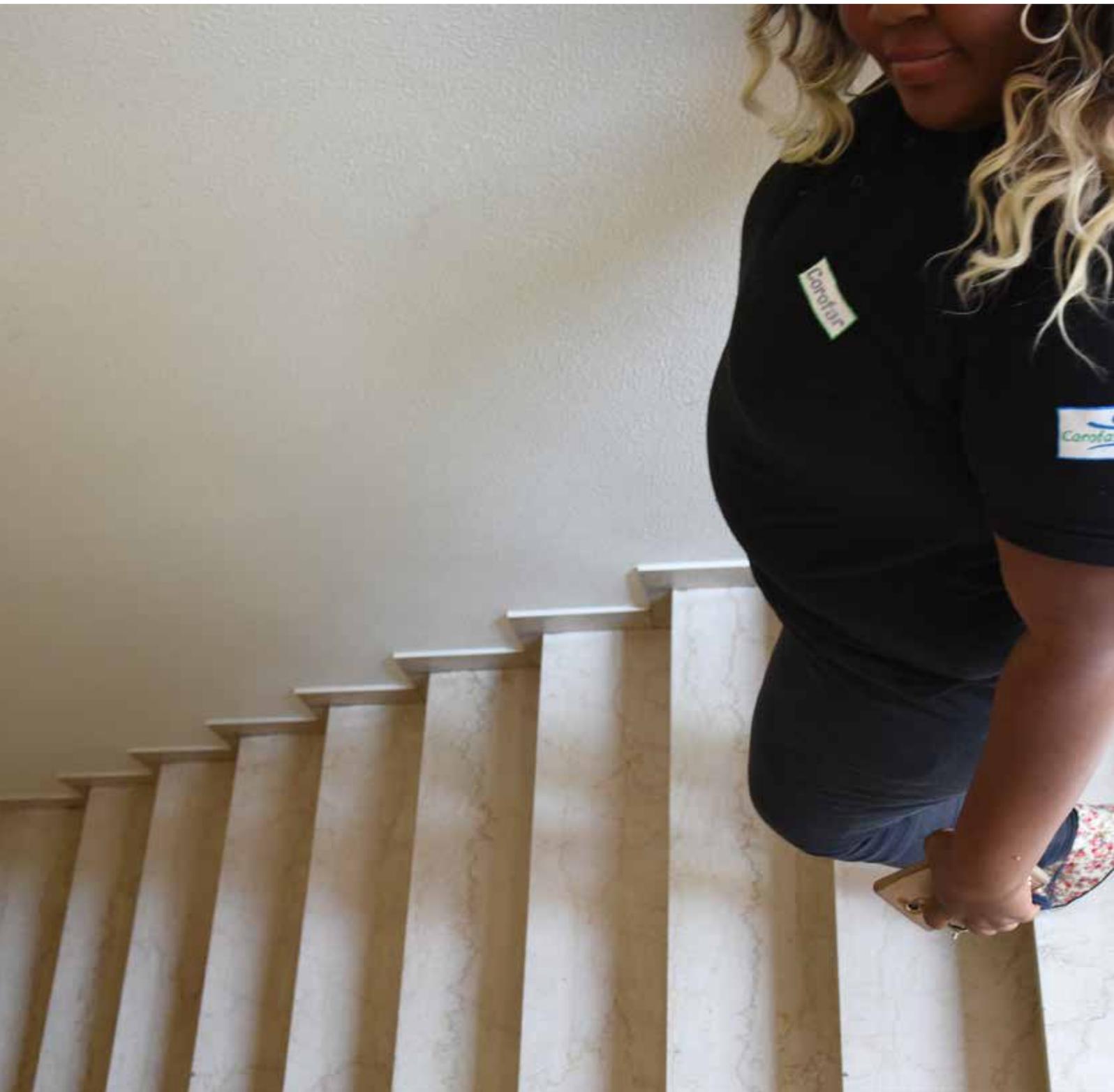


the CAS results in high turnover rates, to the detriment of the continuity of reception and service activities. The extensive use of CAS has drastically deteriorated the quality of reception and for the asylum seekers the inadequacy of legal and psychosocial support is a source of frequent cases of depression or entry into the illegal circuits of black market labour, drug dealing and forced prostitution. Additionally, the



BAOBAB TRANSIT CAMP, ROME, JULY 2016

reception system is anything but uniform and administrative requirements and operating standards change from place to place according to the municipality regulations. While one municipality may require centres to provide linguistic training and apprenticeships, others do not.



WOMAN REFUGEE IN A SHELTER RUN BY ARCI, ROME

Small is better. Alternative approaches for a better first reception line: the case of ARCI

Within the Italian reception system, a few centres have been experimenting alternative approaches in the reception and integration of asylum seekers and refugees. It is the case of ARCI, an independent association for the promotion of social and civil rights whose action plan consists of the involve-

ment of communities and citizens in cooperation between local authorities and migrants, through the enhancement of civil solidarity, the building of networks of interest and the strengthening of democratic ownership. With 111 projects in the field of migrants' reception and integration active in 13 Italian regions, ARCI provides asylum seekers and refugees with 6,095 reception places, of which 3,635 in CAS, 2,360 in SPRAR and 100 in the hub system dedicated to minors⁴³.



A shelter for women refugees in Rome run by ARCI, facilitates the access of new arrivals to the local community simply by offering services that seek to integrate asylum seekers fully and independently into the local context. The key approach for ARCI is “reception integrated with territorial services” meaning “reception aimed at ensuring the asylum seekers’ autonomy, from selecting their accommodation shelters (apartments instead of centres) to skilled staff (operators,

educators, mediators and lawyers), making protection ordinary even in temporary centres”.⁴⁴

In Rome, Monterotondo and Colferro, the SPRAR project AIDA run by ARCI supports 72 women, in partnership with government and immigration authorities, providing shelters where those women can stay while they wait to be granted international protection and find a new direction in their lives. According to Claudio Graziano, the coordinator of the project, “the essential elements of these shelters are a supportive environment, the provision of information about available services and easy access to community facilities and services”. However, while in small urban centres like Monterotondo and Colferro it is easier to build close relationships between the refugees and the local institutions, in Rome the access to services is complicated by the heavy bureaucracy and the scarcity of economic resources and places. Currently, in Rome three SPRAR projects operate offering 2,836 places, of which 62 are for unaccompanied migrants, 6 for women alone or with children, and 2,768 ordinary.

According to Lunaria, the increase of places compared to 2013, when SPRAR offered only 150 places, is due to an emergency strategy of the municipality of Rome that allowed “a) the inclusion into the SPRAR system of some pre-existing structures that were already part of the municipal reception system (but responding to standards other than those provided by SPRAR); b) the decision to not prioritise small structures or reception in apartments (which is at the origin of the SPRAR model); c) the inclusion in the SPRAR network of some large facilities set up during the Northern Africa Emergency (such as the large Enea centre with a capacity of 400 seats); d) the decision not to issue a public tender for the identification of the implementing bodies”.⁴⁵

These programming deficits, in Rome’s case, have distorted the very essence of the SPRAR causing deficiencies both in the provision of services and in the administrative management. Just the size of some SPRAR centres represents one of the main problems highlighted by Rome’s protection associations and some operators. “In addition to the Enea centre, the ex ENA structure offering 400 seats, the Roman SPRAR network consists of one centre of 135 places, one centre of 99, eight centres of 80 seat, 13 centres with capacity ranging from 60 to 75 seats, 13 centres with capacity ranging between 31 and 56 seats, while the remaining structures accommodate up to 30 people. There are cases where SPRAR services share the structure with other types of reception as happens in a centre that simultaneously hosts a SPRAR and a CAS” the Lunaria report says.⁴⁶

A frequent criticism of the Italian reception system and novelties introduced by the Minniti decree concerns the emergency mode under which the government continues to act. ARCI’s operators stress that the shortcomings in full migrant protection are the consequence of patchwork legislation that seems to have been written with inadequate foresight. “If the Italian government would stop viewing the

phenomenon of migration as an emergency, we would be able to have adequate standards that are applied to everyone in the reception system from their first entry in the system”, Claudio Graziano said.

Some attempts to overthrow the model of large numbers and economies of scale exist even in the first reception line. In Formia, a small city in the south of Latium, the cooperative ALTERNATA in partnership with ARCI has recently opened a CAS centre whose approach is “small is better”. The centre, located in a large and luxurious villa seized from the mafia,⁴⁷ currently hosts 15 women asylum seekers from Nigeria, Ivory Coast and Morocco. They are women who have suffered sexual exploitation and violence and to which the project “The Right Home” offers recovery, language and vocational courses, handicrafts workshops, community gardening and full support for their daily inclusion in Formia’s local life.

Antonella Grossi, the cooperative’s legal advisor said “the centre employs mainly women and just one man: a full time psychologist, an education expert, a cultural mediator to support the planning of programmes and activities best suited for those women, and an internal teacher”. In Ms Grossi’s words “empathy, sensitivity and competence are essential to make women feel protected and to integrate them starting from a transitional context such as that of the first reception line”. Stressing the innovative approach of the centre, she said, “the difference in our centre is given by our cultural model and our need to implement need-oriented interventions able to give women credible answers since their first entrance in our centre”. “Good reception is possible – she said with confidence. It all depends on cooperatives and the people who make the cooperatives”.

Conclusions

The lack of places in second-line reception and the aberrations of the first line centres cast doubts on the functioning of the entire Italian migrant reception system. For years, central government and local authorities have continued to debate possible reforms, engaging recently in an arm wrestling match, which has crystallised the dysfunctions without reaching consensus on solutions. The impact of this dispute on asylum seekers and refugees has been difficult to bear. “We are left to ourselves, we have to fight alone” said a young asylum seeker from Western Africa transited in an overcrowded Italian CAS.

On the one hand, the Ministry of Interior is encouraging municipalities to accept the latest plan agreed with ANCI that recommends the reception of small numbers of asylum seekers in all the Italian municipalities and the gradual dismissing of CAS. On the other hand, the municipalities, especially those ruled by right-wing parties, such as the Northern League, firmly contest the plan, like in Gorino, a small town near Ferrara, where barricades were erected to stop the arrival of a busload of 12 asylum seekers forcing them to be sent elsewhere.⁴⁸

On October 2016, the Ministry of Interior issued Law Decree 193/2016⁴⁹ concerning a new plan to improve the reception system aimed at obtaining a gradual and sustainable distribution of asylum seekers and refugees through the phasing out of the CAS, and the consolidation of a uniform reception system based on the expansion of the SPRAR system. However, the Law Decree, while providing 500 euros on time⁵⁰ to all municipalities for each asylum seeker hosted in their territory, does not distinguish between accommodation in SPRAR, government centres or CAS.

According to social operators working in the reception chain, such a view will not easily convince municipalities to participate in SPRAR. Reception places and standards are currently set by local governments, and as an ARCI operator said, “they depend on how local authorities want to manage an unpopular issue especially during the electoral campaign, when politicians from all parties are assailed by voters asking how Italy can absorb so many newcomers”. While compensatory measures for the municipalities involved in the reception system could be important to stimulate participation in the SPRAR tenders, “the real challenge for better reception, is the cultural one” Claudio Graziano from ARCI says. In this sense, the change of pace for many observers could be represented by the National Plan for the Integration of International Protection Holders⁵¹ released by the Ministry of Interior in September 2017. It is the first national strategic plan designed to establish the rights and obligations of those 74,853 migrants who benefit from international protection. Refugees’ obligations include studying the Italian language, respecting the Constitution, recognising the separation of state and religion and respecting women. Meanwhile, Italy must guarantee migrants equality and equal dignity, freedom of religion, access to education and training, housing and access to the healthcare system.

In the words of the Ministry of Interior: “This approach would provide for multi-level systematic action according to the region, local authorities and the tertiary sector, all called upon to develop a coordinated action plan specific enough to ensure the full inclusion and welcoming of foreigners in the community. For this to happen, the ‘integration strategy’ must be ‘sustainable’ and “this is possible only if the presence of foreigners is equally distributed across the national territory”.⁵² A huge challenge, that of migrants’ distribution, given that one of the most critical aspects is the reluctance of local authorities to invest in programmes and interventions designed to support the long-term social and economic inclusion of asylum seekers and refugees.

If the ambition, as clearly stated in the Integration Plan, is the implementation of a single reception system, no doubt exists about the need to drastically rethink the Italian reception chain, reprogramming its operational phases and investing in a diffused reception model based on small centres with excellent standards of social inclusion. As ARCI operators stress, “it is necessary to support existing best practices in reception by ensuring their replicability” in the entire reception chain, which implies the definitive and rapid overcoming

of the emergency approach that has led to the disproportionate growth of the CAS.

Asylum-seekers and refugees reception policies should aim at empowerment and independence. In the same vein services and integration measures provided by local authorities and NGOs should be tailored according to migrants' specific needs. Discrimination, the impossibility of accessing adequately paid jobs, and the inability to interact with the local environment are all factors that influence the migratory project and the trust in the reception system. That is why it is crucial that national and local public authorities and NGOs develop participatory reception measures that take fully into account the needs expressed directly by refugees and asylum seekers as to empower them and ensure their full inclusion in the host society.



A MIGRANT WAITING TO CROSS THE BORDER FROM ITALY TO FRANCE, VENTIMIGLIA, JULY 2016



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INCLUSION OF YOUNG REFUGEES IN GERMANY – WHAT DO THEY NEED TO SETTLE DOWN AND MAKE USE OF THEIR POTENTIAL?

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Young refugees arrive and are provided with services, but are they also being seen?

Young refugees have increasingly sought protection in Europe and especially in Germany since the years 2014-2015. As minors they are a vulnerable group presenting very particular life circumstances and needs, which have not only become the focus of socio-political discourse in academic circles and among political actors, but have also received increased attention in the media and the public opinion.

The numerous arrivals of minor refugees in Germany can be illustrated with figures. The number of arrivals of people seeking asylum in Germany reached a peak in 2016. Over one third of those who first applied for asylum in Germany in 2016 were children and adolescents (36.2%). This percentage represents a total over 261,000 young refugees who alone or together with their families seek security and temporary protection; however, in most cases they seek a new life in Germany. The two major groups of underage children seeking asylum are those between the age of four and six years old and the one of children between the age of six and eleven. The proportion of male asylum seekers increases significantly with age, both in the case of children and adults. While the ratio of children under the age of four is almost balanced (51.6% male and 48.4% female), male applicants between the age of 16 and 18 represent the clear majority at 80.3%.³

In Germany the protection of children and adolescents is established by law in accordance with the ratification of the ratified United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child and the German Child and Youth Welfare Act (SGB VIII). Under Article 22 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child underage refugees have to be provided with an "appropriate protection", whether they are accompanied by their parents, by any person with the rights of custody or are unaccompanied. In addition, not only underage refugees but also youths are the subject of the German Child and Youth Welfare Act which states in its first article (Article 1, SGB VIII): "Every young person has the right to be empowered through education to achieve an independent and socially competent personality". This social right is effective for all children and young people on the German territory, including young refugees. However, it is important to note that due to the high number of children and youths arriving in Germany in recent years, the application of this and other social rights for every child and youth in Germany as well as the guarantee of the quality standards in the provision of social services stated in the German law has been difficult to achieve in the particular case of young refugees.

Another additional challenge to promoting the well-being and inclusion of refugee children and youths in Germany is the different models of welfare provision that exist across German regions. This is for example the case in the school system which has different terms of access for young refugees depending on which German state they are in. In some federal states, such as North Rhine-Westphalia, Hesse or Lower Saxony, compulsory school education begins only after the asylum seeker has been assigned to a community and has left the first reception

centre. In other states, such as Berlin, Hamburg or Rhineland-Palatinate, asylum-seeking children and adolescents have the opportunity to attend a school immediately after registering in the first reception centre.⁴

Unaccompanied minors – at the centre of the public and political debate

Special attention is paid in the public discourse to unaccompanied minor refugees. According to official data from the Federal Government there were around 60,600 unaccompanied minors living in Germany in February 2016.⁵ This data recorded by German institutions refers to children and youths who seek asylum or are entitled to asylum and receive childcare and youth welfare services. A turning point in the development of these numbers can be observed since May 2016: the youth welfare institutions have registered fewer minors each month. However, the number of young adults living in Germany subject to youth and welfare service provision, i.e. adults between the ages of 18 and 27 as defined in the German Child and Youth Welfare Act, has increased. While in December 2016 there were around 14,300, in November 2015 only about 6,400 young adults were registered. Currently, according to data of February 2017, there are around 43,800 underage minors living in Germany. The welfare provision for and legal responsibility over children without parents is stated both in the SGB VIII and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. If an unaccompanied minor is settled within the area of responsibility of a youth welfare office, this institution has a duty to initiate a procedure for "examining the custody" and take responsibility for the children or adolescent.

The high number of arrivals of unaccompanied minors has led to an acute need for action in German child and youth welfare. The welfare structures for unaccompanied minor refugees have been expanded and the legal framework has been amended to guarantee the security and well being of the children and youths. Among other measures, the minimum age of consent to was increased from 16 to 18 years (Art. 80 Residence Law). In addition to amendments in the legal framework in order to deal with the situation, social workers and welfare institutions started to develop and implement new and more flexible approaches to work with young refugees. Some of these approaches were valuable and forward-looking, but many others implied lowering given standards in the provision of welfare services. Thus, the Federal Association for Unaccompanied Minor Refugees (Bundesfachverband unbegleitete minderjährige Flüchtlinge e.V.) notes that "ignoring the rights of young refugees to protection, social participation, healthcare and education is part of the every-day life in many German accommodation centres for refugees".⁶

Accompanied minors – the majority of young refugees

Minor refugees accompanied either by their families or other persons responsible for their custody, make up the majority of underage refugees. Nonetheless, they have received much less attention than unaccompanied refugees in the public

debate. In 2016 over 225,000 children and adolescents arrived in Germany with their parents or other persons responsible for their custody. This accounts for 86.2% of the total number of minors arriving in Germany.⁷ Although they are accompanied by close relatives and thus benefit from an important social resource, they are subject to many risks regarding basic services and their inclusion. Among other reasons, this is due to the fact that children and adolescents who have left their home countries with their parents are accommodated according to their parents' conditions of residence. This situation leads in many cases to an inappropriate provision for minors, as stated in the report of the German Committee for UNICEF published in 2016. This report identifies several serious problems, such as "overcrowding, poor sanitation, lack of protection, poor nutrition, lack of employment and incentives and multiple acts of violence in reception centres, shelters and shared accommodation centres which shape the everyday lives of children and adolescents".

Lack of knowledge and research regarding the needs of young refugees

Besides the difficult situation young refugees often face in Germany, there are many factors which make dealing with the young refugees' situation challenging for actors in politics, civil society, business or academic circles. These include among others the large number of children and adolescents who arrived in Germany within such a short period of time, the wide variety of their national and family backgrounds, their experiences during their journey to Germany and also the different potentials and aspirations that they have.

At the municipal level, for instance, institutions faced several challenges. These included primarily the evaluation of the availability of resources, redefining responsibilities and guaranteeing basic care. Although municipalities have gained much practical experience dealing with this situation over the last years, there is little systematic knowledge on the concrete needs of young refugees.⁸ In order to provide optimal and superregional support for refugee children and adolescents and to be able to offer them appropriate life opportunities, such knowledge is vital.

There are very few empirical studies on the living environment and the everyday life of underage refugees in Germany. An expert study published in 2015 by the Robert Bosch Foundation stated, that so far research on the life situation of young refugees has been only a "marginal phenomenon of social-science migration research in Germany". Research on this topic has been fragmented and unsystematic. However, the main problem is the lack of reliable empirical material and data addressing the concrete living and integration situation of refugees. According to Kleist, research about refugees in Germany has not been an established field of research in the academic landscape, even though many social-scientists and scholars from very diverse disciplines devoted themselves to the areas of migration and asylum for several years. As a result of the lack of knowledge and research in this field, the needs of refugee children and adolescents are often being overlooked.

To that extent, research on asylum and on the life-environments of refugees can contribute to "fill an important gap between government and advocacy statements on asylum and refugee policies with research-based assessments".⁹

The review of recent studies about the situation of refugees in Germany show common results which are outlined below:¹⁰

- A central finding of several studies is that the specific interests of refugee children in Germany are often disregarded by politics, (civil) society and institutions. Moreover, children are rarely perceived in political, social and institutional spheres as "independent rights holders".
- Another key finding is that growing up as a refugee child in Germany represents a "significant disadvantage" in comparison to children without any refugee experience. This is principally due to accommodation in centres isolated from urban areas, and limited access to recreational facilities and medical care, among other factors.
- Some studies address the importance of family and friends in the everyday life of refugees. The contact with the family members provides support and safety for the children, while the loss of family members or breaks in relationships significantly affect their well-being. Many adolescents express a longing for belonging and acceptance among their peers.¹¹
- Many studies identify school as a key place not only for education and language learning, but as a key place for the life of young refugees. On the one hand, many refugees in school as well as some individual teachers see school as a resource which fosters both the well-being of refugees and their familiarity with Germany.¹² On the other hand, other studies point out that teachers and school coordinators seldom consider different educational backgrounds and contribute to the building of "migration classes" in which refugees with heterogeneous educational backgrounds attend the same classes. This is perceived by many adolescents as a very negative experiences.¹³

Several studies highlight the fact that many refugee children and adolescents suffer from mental stress. This is partly due to their concerns about their asylum procedure, which is associated by many young refugees with permanent insecurity and with an "endurance challenge".¹⁴ Adolescents also claim to be suffering from the lack of understanding of some teachers with regard to their language skills and therefore their ability to perform.¹⁵

Even if recent studies in Germany provide important insights into the life circumstances of young refugees, most of them have one thing in common: they are conceived and conducted with a very strong focus on the particular perspective of institutions and welfare systems. This perspective may lead to a problem-centred approach which in the end focuses on the hurdles that institutions and organizations have to overcome to take care of young refugees. The real life situation,

circumstances and needs of the most important group, namely refugees and in particular children and youngsters, was rarely explored. Children and adolescents should be seen as independent subjects and as independent holders of rights, they have desires, aspirations, their own vision of the future and their own initiative. This potential of young refugees is a key factor in their inclusion in German and European societies. Hence, the present contribution addresses the following question: what sort of support systems and social services do we need to unleash the potential of young refugees? This question combines two analytical dimensions: the life circumstances of young refugees and the shape of the welfare system. From the authors' perspective this is the most feasible approach to guarantee the long-term inclusion of young refugees.

Empirical material and research framework. Focusing on both young refugees and the welfare provision

In order to find answers to the question posed above – what sort of support systems and social services do we need to unleash the potential of young refugees? – the present contribution is based on the empirical material of the research project “Young Refugees NRW”.¹⁶ Compared to other studies mentioned above, the research framework applied in this project and referred to in this contribution has unique advantages in several respects. The framework has a multi-dimensional approach to improve and process findings on the needs of refugee children and adolescents, since it puts in the same analysis the needs of both refugees and welfare provision systems. To that extent, it combines empirical social research and practical social work and deepens our knowledge about the life circumstances of refugee children and adolescents in the framework of the practical social work in welfare institutions. A key aim of the project was to give a voice to refugee children and adolescents: they had the possibility to report themselves on their life circumstances and experiences in Germany.

The research framework benefits from the fact that it involved a continuous dialogue with the main actors to promote the well-being and the inclusion of young refugees, namely social workers. The surveys used to collect the empirical material were developed by the Institute for Social Work and Social Education and the findings of the research were discussed on several occasions in workshops with volunteers, employees and employers of social services working with refugees.

The theoretical foundation of the survey for the interviews with the refugees was based on the four central dimensions of the concept of subjective well-being. This approach focuses on the personal view of the respondents about their well-being, giving thus the possibility to collect the multiple needs and experiences of refugee children and adolescents interviewed. It covers the following four pillars: education; social relationships; health; lifestyle. Both the survey and the analysis in the evaluation process of the empirical material were also conceived building on these four pillars.

Interviews with young refugees

The respondents among groups of refugees included 45 both accompanied and unaccompanied young refugees. In order to cover a wide variety of living situations across the group of young refugees the sample was divided using the following criteria: age, current status in the asylum procedure and family situation. The following three subgroups were considered: unaccompanied minor refugees in child and youth welfare facilities; minor refugees living with their families in shared accommodation centres; unaccompanied minor refugees and refugee families who moved from accommodation to independent accommodation facilities.

The interviews with the young refugees focused on three countries of origin of refugees: Afghanistan, Eritrea and Syria. In the 45 interviews, a total of 61 children under the age of 20 were interviewed: 9 children between the ages of 0 to 3 years; 9 children between the ages of 4 to 6 years;¹⁷ 14 children between the ages of 7 to 10 years; 7 children between the ages of 11 and 13; 19 teenagers between the ages of 14 and 17; 3 young adults between the ages of 18 to 20 years.



educational and professional aspirations; experiences with institutions providing social services; value and meaning of social relationships; projections for the future life.

Every interview was recorded digitally and transcribed. The analysis used a coding methodology with the software MAXQDA. The analysis was carried out in accordance with the Mayring's method of qualitative content analysis.¹⁸

Focus groups with the key actors of the welfare system

The second part of the empirical material included twelve focus group interviews with professionals and volunteers who work directly with young refugees and their families. The groups were put together according to their organisational structure for working with the refugees: associations: Among others youth migration services, refugee shelter workers, community integration centres, voluntary welfare agencies, youth housing groups and clearing houses; day-care centres: mainly supervisors, employees and volunteers; schools and social services working on career transitions: school social workers, employees in employment agencies, employees of school offices, etc.; volunteering initiatives: mainly volunteers and volunteer coordinators.

All interviews took place in the period from March 2015 to the beginning of June 2016. The surveys as well as the focus groups were carried out in three municipalities which were selected considering geographical criteria (a county seat, a city and a district).

In the next section the findings from the analysis of the interviews with the young refugees are explained and contextualised within integration theory, while the last one shows the findings of the focus groups' interviews with professionals and volunteers. The latter findings aim to examine the potential of welfare approaches observed in the analysis of the empirical material.

The contribution of young refugees to achieving their integration in Germany

There is consensus in migration sociology on the definition of the term "integration" as a process of "inserting populations into existing social structures in terms of socio-economic, legal, and cultural relationships".¹⁹ This theoretical framework includes four areas in which certain requirements have to be met in order to achieve integration. The four areas which build the inclusion process are: cultural integration; structural integration; social integration, and identificatory or emotional integration.

Cultural integration includes cognitive skills, such as language, as well as the internalisation or recognition of values, norms and attitudes of a particular society. Structural integration first and foremost refers to the (preconditions for) participation in the central institutions and systems of the host society (education system, labour market, legal administrative procedures, etc.). Social integration takes place at the level of interpersonal relationships which can be measured with regard to the opportunity to establish contact with other people. The subjective sense of belonging, i.e. the question of whether or not migrants perceive themselves as part of society and identify themselves with it, is ultimately the core aspect of emotional integration.

It has to be noted that the term "integration" is connected with the basic assumption that there are integrated persons and

integrating elements. This evokes legitimate criticism among professionals and scholars in the fields of migration because the concept of integration does not consider the heterogeneous social reality and the shared social responsibility to achieve the social participation of everyone in the society.²⁰ However, in this section of the present contribution it is considered appropriate to work with the term of inclusion since the children and adolescents do not aspire to reach an abstract process of social change. Their first aim is rather to master their everyday life and the emerging challenges in their new country.

Nonetheless, integration always has to be supported by certain attitudes and conditions (i.e. integrating elements) in the host society: a successful integration is therefore characterised by a two-way process that implies overcoming exclusionary social conditions.²¹ In a nutshell, this procedure follows to the achievement of “inclusion” in a broad sense, i.e. promoting a culture that respects and appreciates the individual diversity within society and demands non-discriminatory treatment of individuals by means of their heterogeneity. In the sense of this reciprocity it is no longer only the task of the individual to integrate and adapt himself to certain existing structures, but it is the duty of society and the state to shape structures in a way that the individual’s right to an equal and self-determined participation in all areas of society is guaranteed.

The findings of empirical material with a focus on the resources of refugee children and adolescents to achieve integration show that they have important strengths and abilities which actively contribute to their settling down in their new life-world. The analysis of the interviews based on “subjective well-being” areas shows that these strengths and abilities embrace all dimensions of the theoretical model of integration.

Cultural integration

On the level of cultural integration, the individual stories of the young refugees show that they are undertaking a variety of efforts on their own initiative in order to learn German quickly and well in order to be able to exchange points of view with German-speaking people. They go to libraries and borrow books, they learn with the help of YouTube videos, children’s programs on TV, translation apps and dictionaries, they search on their own for ways to attend a German courses, learn under the guidance of their older siblings and parents or with learning materials that their teachers sometimes give them. It is impressive how actively and independently the children and adolescents strive to learn the German language. Many children and adolescents spend a big amount of time learning in the afternoon after school.





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Structural integration

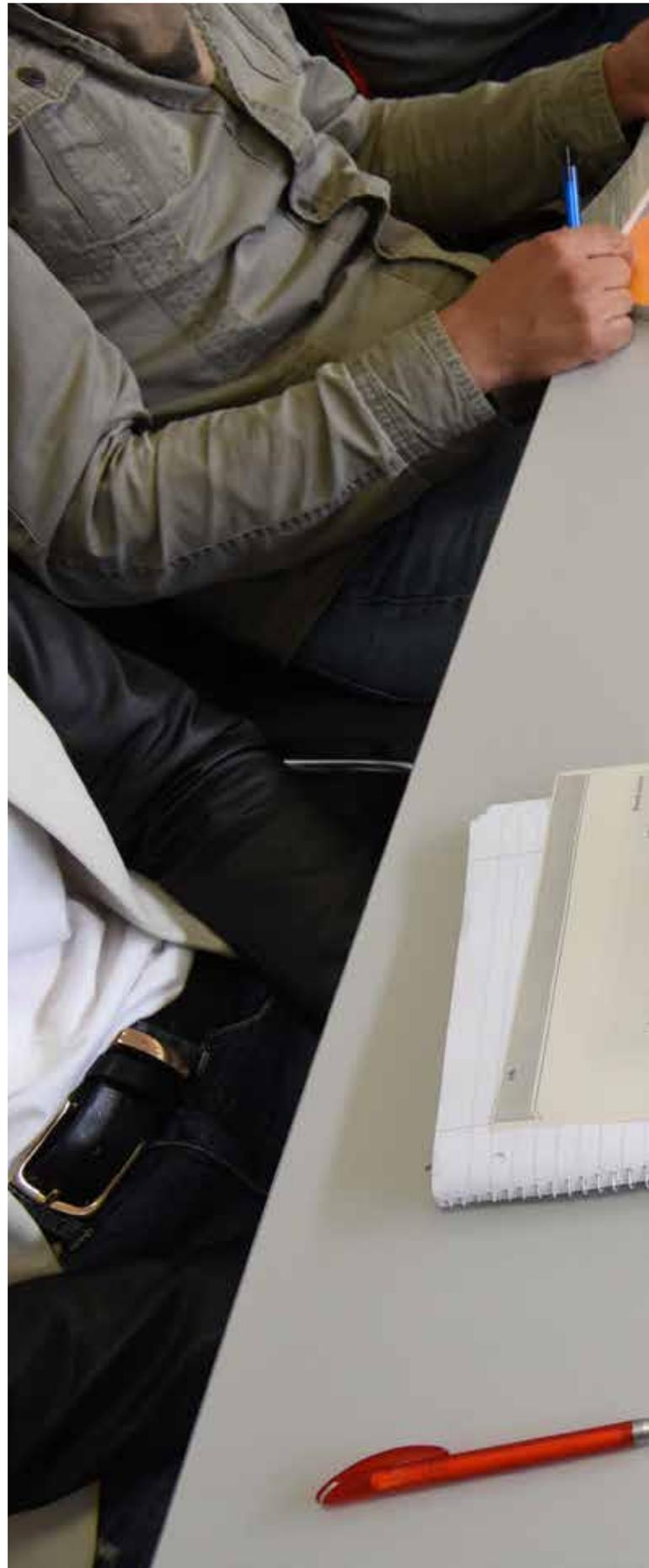
At the level of structural integration, young refugees bring two central resources: they have a great willingness to learn and they have high educational aspirations. Without exception, all children and adolescents tell that they enjoy going to kindergartens or schools. Some children and adolescents explicitly describe their school attendance as a life-opportunity, especially given their educational history in their country of origin or in the countries where they lived in the meantime. They want to learn how to interact with other children and describe education as a condition for fulfilling their wishes for the future. When children and adolescents are asked about their career aspirations, they usually name academic professions related to institutional structures. They want to become doctors, policemen, lawyers or civil engineers, among others. Refugee children and adolescents also associate their flight to Germany with the hope of an improved social status. Without exception they know and clearly state that the achievement of their professional goals will require a lot of effort and that it will take a long time. However, they are confident that they will succeed and express a strong willingness to work for it.

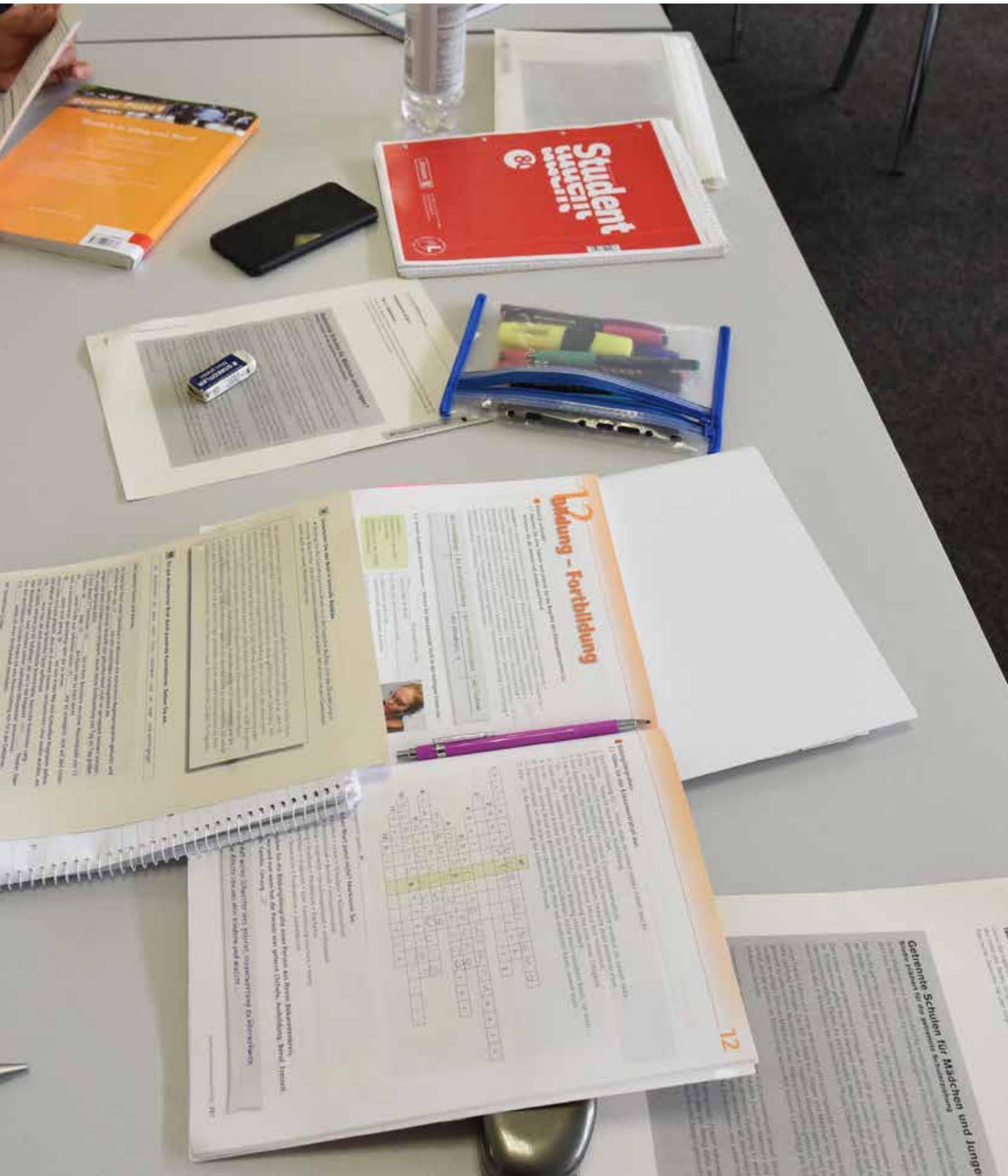
Social integration

Regarding social inclusion, particular emphasis should be put on the ability of refugee children and adolescents to connect at a personal level with other children or young people, thereby making friendships. With a few exceptions, refugee children and teens say that they have made friends. Most of the friendships are made with non-German children and adolescents and the majority of the social relationships with other people are not freely chosen but result from their living conditions in shared accommodation shelters. However, young refugees explain that they actively make efforts to get to know other children and adolescents and that they also make efforts to stay in touch with friends who are now in other places. The children and adolescents usually have close relationships with their teachers, social workers and voluntary caregivers. Despite the many experiences of separation and contact abandonment that the children describe in the interviews, they retain the ability and motivation to engage in close emotional relationships.

Identificatory or emotional integration

At the level of identificatory or emotional integration the findings show that children, given their individual experiences of persecution, threat and discrimination, perceive Germany as a country that not only provides them with security, but also offers them social life standards which they want to implement in their every-day life. Older children and adolescents, for example, describe an absence of arbitrariness in the use of authority. They perceive this helpful to freely choose their decisions in life. Of course, depending on their life situation, young refugees mourn their homeland in different ways, yet few express a desire to return. On the contrary, children and adolescents often say that they like life in Germany and that they can identify with the forms of lifestyle it offers and therefore wish to stay in the long-term.





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What needs to be changed in Germany to achieve the inclusion of young refugees? Four policy guiding principles for welfare structures and social work

An analysis of the twelve focus groups interviews conducted with professionals and volunteers who work directly with young refugees and their families was carried out to find out what young refugees need in order to be included in the German society. In other words: this part of the analysis addressed the question in the title of this chapter: “what needs to be changed in Germany to achieve the inclusion of young refugees?” The findings can be structured along four policy-guiding principles for welfare structures and social work. These guiding principles are formulated under the premise that the German welfare state has access the professional expertise and resources needed to implement them. The four guiding principles for welfare structures and social work are the following ones and will be clarified in the subchapters below: mutual supportive relationships to achieve preventive practices; needs-oriented add-ons to make institutional support structures more inclusive; democratic value orientation to promote an inclusive culture; high regard for personal resources to establish the basis for the future changes in their lives.

Mutual supportive relationship to achieve preventive practices

Social identification is a prerequisite for social participation. This raises the question of how the sense of belonging and identification of young refugees can be fostered in order to achieve social and cultural integration. According to Kronauer,²² “interdependence relationships” contribute significantly to status, self-image and a sense of belonging. The concept of “interdependence relationships” is originally related to the labour market, conveying the experience of being needed and not being superfluous or unilaterally dependent on the receiving society. Young refugees often find themselves disadvantaged because their specific needs are often ignored by politics, (civil) society and public administrations.²³ This precept contradicts the principle of both inclusion and integration, since it does not fit with the findings shown above which point out that refugee children and adolescents bring with them core competences that are essential for their integration in Germany.

In this respect, a paradigm shift is needed in the institutional interaction with young refugees in Germany. Creating mutual relationships means using the existing competences and resources of refugee children and adolescents in a spirit of community-building, creating the necessary conditions for self-determined participation in the community. Young refugees and their families should not be isolated into the simple role of beneficiaries, but should be strengthened from the beginning as autonomous actors. They should be familiarised and empowered by institutions with the right to design their everyday life. On the other hand, it is also important to widen the understanding of welfare service providers and

institutions in such a way that they can be influenced by the needs of young refugees and their families from the very beginning.

Needs-oriented add-ons to make institutional support structures more inclusive

Young refugees bring with them very different life circumstances. Although several needs can be observed in all young refugees, their life situation in Germany presents very heterogeneous challenges. Some young people and their families fulfil the criteria of “subjective well-being”, while others are exposed to great stress and isolation.²⁴ Therefore, in addition to a normal and continuity welfare provision in education and care, there is a need for flexible and individualised services.

Currently, it can be stated that the chances of young refugees to settle down in Germany are severely limited. This is mainly due to certain discriminatory practices in schools and accommodation centres. For example, the different education levels of refugee minors are seldom taken into account. Preparatory classes during long periods of time for young refugees are usually formed solely considering their “asylum seeker” status, i.e. without considering their age, educational background or their countries of origin. Children and adolescents perceive this as an educational disadvantage as well as a massive restriction to establish social relationships with natives. They feel separated and isolated because of their “migrant-status”. Likewise, segregated forms of accommodation – whether in collective or individual housing – are *de facto* also a massive restriction to establishing contact with natives.

With regard to refugee children and adolescents, there is no need to shape a completely new welfare system. The welfare system should rather incorporate needs-oriented add-ons, i.e. support mechanisms within welfare structures for particular necessities. An example of a need-oriented add-on would be the education in regular education classes with additional language provision for young refugees and/or designated persons, for example German-speaking classmates of the same age. In order to achieve an inclusive welfare system with efficient needs-oriented add-on’s, the development of a comprehensive strategy ensuring the coordinated interaction of all necessary actors is essential. Such strategies are supposed to interconnect available social services with target-group-specific additional support services.

Democratic value orientation to promote an inclusive culture

From a sociological perspective values are generally understood as principles that guide people’s actions. These principles can represent for example cultural, religious, social or ethical models. In their essence, they include ideas about what people desire.²⁵ The findings of the interviews show that the refugee children and adolescents strongly assimilate the values they observe and perceive in



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Germany. In the interviews they were able to formulate subjective canon of values, their own model of a “good person”, and other perceptions of lived social consensus according to their observations and perceptions in Germany. Generally, they perceive Germany as a country in which values and norms enable them to live safely. Older children and adolescents in particular affirm that they observe an absence of arbitrariness in the use of power and authority. These findings go in line with the results of an expertise by the Robert Bosch Foundation which states that refugees usually deal intensively with the values and cultural differences of the host country strengthening their feelings of belonging as well as their intention to adapt to the host culture.

In the focus groups the social workers and volunteers working with refugees expressed doubts and insecurity when dealing with cultural diversity, but in particular within possible or existing confrontations between the set of values of refugees and those of the local population. The most common topics social workers and volunteers mention in this regard are “discrimination”, “gender equality”, “nonviolence” or “acceptance of diversity”. In their every-day work routine professionals and volunteers have rarely the opportunity to discuss, reflect, or even actively initiate discussions about joint and conscious value building processes with refugees.

Without active and joint formation of common values with refugee children and adolescents they will not be able to actively and voluntarily engage and deal with their environment. The formation of common values is a three-step approach of subjective orientation, recognition of basic democratic values and acquisition of competences for value-oriented action. The formation of values that solely come from the concepts of child and youth welfare institutions in Germany would fall short of meeting the goal of the development of community-minded and responsible citizens. This means that the process of value formation should not imply a hierarchical process of mediation according to majoritarian societal guiding principles, but rather a process of dialogue.

Therefore, approaches that firmly anchor the formation of values in centres for child and youth welfare as well as educational institutions are needed. These approaches include among others intercultural kindergartens or anti-bias approaches which empower the role and functions of educators. The mutual exchange of values is the necessary basis for building bonds and mutual trust as well as securing the democratic competences and orientation of every group and individual.

Building high regard of personal resources to establish the basis of coming life changes

If young refugees have a positive experience with authorities and institutions, that helps meet the important requisite of ensuring that refugees make use of institutions and authorities in the future. In addition to the general experience of institutional support, the experience with institutions and authorities can be enhanced when personal and trusting relationships are formed between young refugees and the

social workers in housing, playgroups, kindergartens and schools. According to the findings of the empirical analysis, these relationships are crucial to obtain relevant information about administrative and institutional procedures.

Social workers are generally well-qualified and actively engaged in fostering the well-being and the personal development of young refugees. However, many skilled workers and volunteers also report an excessive work load, finding it difficult to meet all the needs of young refugees, such as, inter alia, acting as an information-centre on diverse everyday topics, dealing with the non-transparent decisions of the administrations, etc. Professionals also report that it is very stressful for them to often have to “react rather than act (in the sense of preventive measures)” or act according to their intuition.

The value and maintenance of these personal professional resources, as well as the skills of volunteers, is an important prerequisite for working effectively with young refugees. Professionals need recognition, targeted further qualifications and, if necessary, supportive measures such as supervision and health management services. This applies not only to social work institutions, but also to administrative staff.

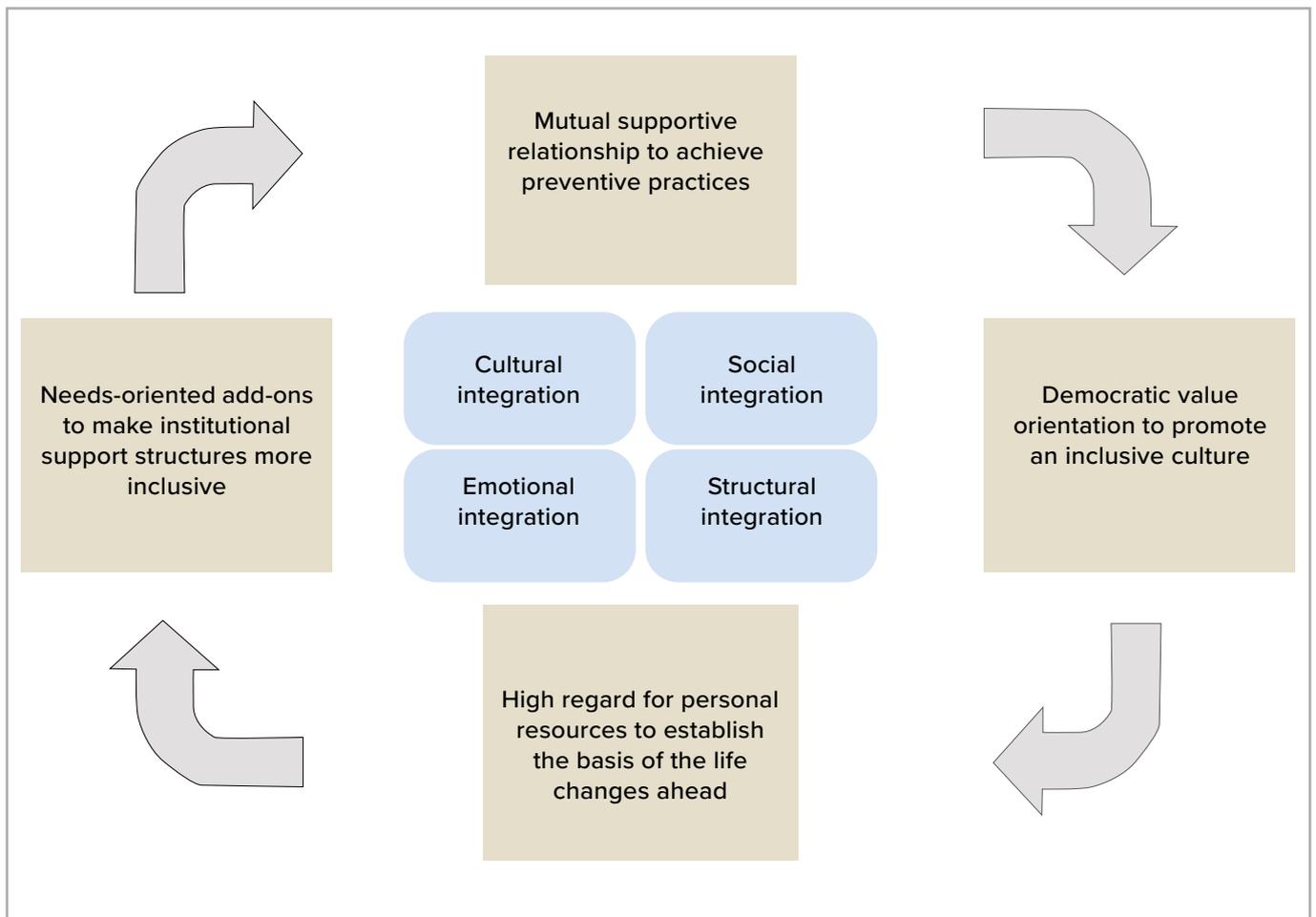
Conclusion – Inclusive welfare approaches as a key to leveraging the potential of young refugees

The findings of the research framework led to the development of a model depicted in the figure below. The ultimate goal of this reciprocal model is to leverage the potential of young refugees. Within this model the resources the young refugees have to foster their own integration (inner circle, see above section on young refugees’ contribution to their integration) as well as the advantages of implementing inclusive welfare approaches (outer circle, see previous section) are meant to interact with each other.

As mentioned in the observations made after interviewing young refugees, they meet many important requirements for achieving integration, taken to mean the process of inserting populations into existing social structures. Although this is not an inclusive approach, taking into account the hurdles faced by and potential shown by young refugees to settle down in Germany, the process of integration is seen as an intrinsic goal of the young refugees interviewed. In a nutshell, the requirements for integration are met through the willingness and high aspirations of young refugees to culturally, socially, emotionally and structurally interact within existing social, economic, legal, cultural and administrative structures in Germany. In this regard, many young refugees should not primarily be regarded as victims, but as individuals with potential and a wide variety of life aspirations which should be fostered.

Bearing the attitude of young refugees in mind, there are several approaches within the welfare structure which can be adapted to take into account, but most importantly leverage, the potential of young refugees. The aim should not

Figure 1: Inclusive welfare approaches as a key to leveraging the potential of young refugees



Source: Authors

be to completely modify existing welfare structures. These should rather be adapted in an inclusive way in order to interact with young refugees on an equal footing, being aware of their needs and life circumstances.

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In 2015-2016, when the influx of refugees trying to escape from conflict and persecution and seek asylum in Europe was at its climax, the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) and SOLIDAR launched the common project “From Europe to local: Migrating solidarity”, which aimed at analysing the crucial role that civil society organisations all over Europe played in offering assistance, support and comfort to migrants wishing to integrate in European societies. As a result, a first book focused on the difficult relations between NGOs and public authorities – at local, national and European level – responsible for the integration process.

In this publication, we focus our attention on the migrants’ journey across Europe, from the problems of the very first reception to the integration stage. Furthermore, as the number of vulnerable migrants, namely women and minors, has been growing, we decided that particular attention should be paid to them, their needs and the services offered to them. The result of our efforts is this book, an assessment of first reception services in Greece and Italy and of the integration of young migrants in Germany. The book symbolically covers the three countries that have been most affected – in absolute terms – by what has been called the refugee crisis; which is being defined by an increasing number of observers as a crisis of solidarity.