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Borderlines of Despair:

First-line reception of asylum seekers
at the Greek borders



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implemented by the Greek Council for Refugees*

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Introduction

The implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement on March 20, 2016 (henceforth the “Statement”),¹ coupled with the closure of the so-called “Balkan Route”, led to a drastic decrease of the unprecedented refugee flows experienced throughout 2015 in the Eastern Mediterranean. It also led to the entrapment of more than 50,000 refugees and asylum seekers in Greece, and especially on the five main island points of entry: Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Leros and Kos.

Shortly afterwards, on April 3, 2016, the Greek Parliament adopted Law 4375/2016 (henceforth L.4375/2016),² introducing the “fast-track border procedure”, which though providing less safeguards for asylum seekers and applicable only under exceptional circumstances, has been since used with a view to the Statement’s implementation.³ In the same context, the “first country of asylum” and “safe third country” clauses, which formed part of previous legislation, were now used to implement the Statement, by making it possible to return (“readmission”) to Turkey not only newly arrived (at the islands) “irregular migrants,” but also asylum seekers and refugees whose asylum applications would thereafter be found “inadmissible”, as per a clause that had never before been previously enforced.

Cumulatively, these events marked a new chapter in the Greek/European management of Migration, with one of its defining characteristics being the gradual (re)institutionalization of the overall management of Greek-bound mixed migration flows.⁴ In the meanwhile, and within this state-led re-appropriation of border management, the newly established island Reception and Identification Centers (RICs), as well as the land border RIC of Evros (RIC at Fylakio, Evros), became the frontline structures for the reception and accommodation of foreign nationals/non-nationals fleeing persecution and/or destitution.

The project

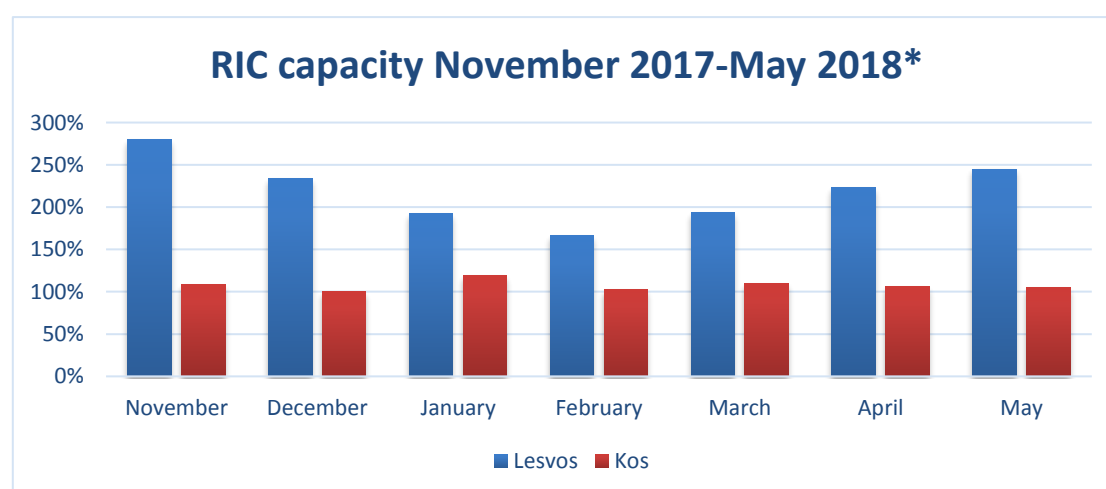
In this context, the current project was aimed at assessing how (and if) some aspects of the reception of third-country nationals/non-nationals at the Greek borders evolved since the Statement’s implementation in March 2016, and up to the research’s conclusion in April 2018.

The point of reference for this was the recast European Directive on the reception of applicants for international protection (Reception Directive),⁵ which though belatedly transposed into Greek legislation on the 15th of May 2018, still provides/provided for the absolute minimum standards for the reception of third country nationals/non-nationals applying for asylum in Europe, and therefore in Greece as well. The primary analytical lens, however, was that of the experiences to which asylum seekers have been subjected throughout their initial reception at the Greek borders, in the context of their

RIC-based reception and accommodation. Therefore, the main underlying questions revolved around what happens when asylum seekers arrive in Greece, to what extent are their reception and accommodation (living conditions) in line with the imperative to respect and protect their decency and rights, and what are the effects of reception towards both their short and long-term wellbeing, as well as their relation with their new host society.

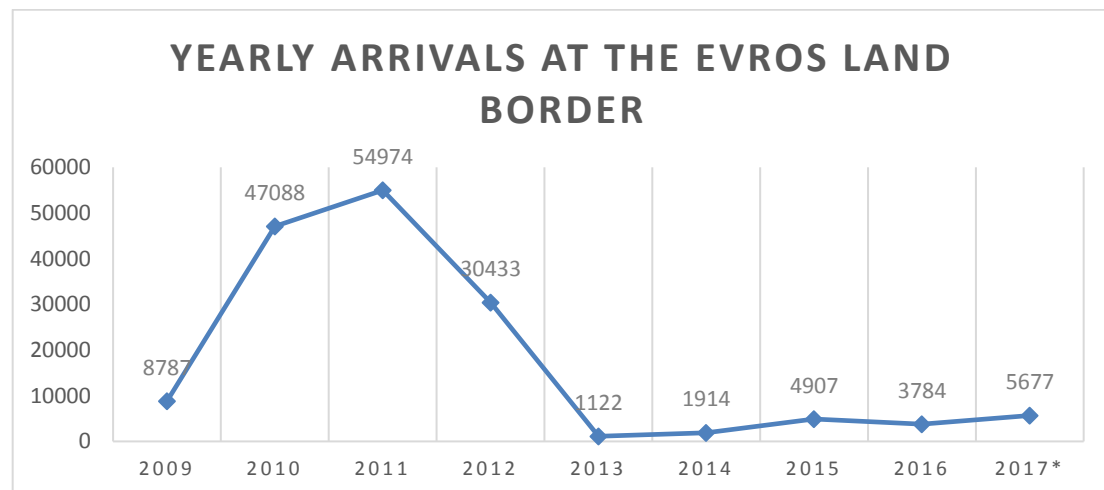
In terms of methodology, the project was based on interviews with officials and/or other professionals engaged in the field of refugee protection, field research and desk-based research. Interviews and discussions were primarily carried out with GCR personnel at the borders and in Athens and Thessaloniki, and were complemented by some 38 additional interviews with state and other officials and employees working in the field.⁶ Desk research consisted primarily of reviewing GCR's internal and published reports, legal documents, as well as reports and articles published by intergovernmental, non-governmental and other organizations and professionals. Field research, lastly, consisted of visiting a number of refugee reception sites (RICs) and Pre-Removal Centers, of which those found at the island border regions of Lesbos and Kos, the Greek-Turkish land border of Evros, as well as two makeshift accommodation sites/squats at the city-port of Patra will be examined in the current report.

Reasons for choosing the specific regions were quite straightforward. Notwithstanding diverging levels of publicity which the islands of **Lesvos** and **Kos** have taken throughout the past two years, they presented an interesting testing ground for assessing whether the up to date highly criticized conditions on the Greek islands are solely pertinent on the numbers of irregular arrivals. Indeed, the two islands represent quite diverging cases in terms of the population of third-country nationals/non-nationals they have each received, as in stark contrast to the ever over-congested RIC of Moria, **Lesvos**, the RIC at Pyli, **Kos**, has historically –so to speak– found itself at “manageable” levels of congestion.



Source: Ministry of Digital, Telecommunications and Information Policy⁷. *Up to the 20th of May, as per the last available data at the time of publication.

The Greek-Turkish land border of **Evros**, on the other hand, had for years constituted the main entry-point for third-country nationals/non-nationals fleeing persecution or destitution towards Europe. That is, until 2013, when increased security controls and a border fence built in 2012 led, on the one hand, to drastically reducing the number of arrivals and, on the other, to “displacing” them towards the well-known, by now, Aegean islands. Yet despite its “low profile” in terms of media and political attention, as the latter have for three years now been predominantly focused on the situation in the Aegean, Evros remained and is once more gradually becoming a significant entry-point for mixed migration flows, with reception-related problems of its own.⁸



Source: Hellenic Police.⁹ *To be noted, as per a Press Release issued by the Ministry of Citizen Protection on 30.01.18,¹⁰ Evros-based arrivals well exceeded the numbers provided by the police (7,544).

The city-port of **Patra**, lastly, though not a border point of entry has traditionally been a border point of exit from Greece to Italy, and from there to the rest of Europe. Significantly, since the summer of 2017, Patra saw a renewed surge in (secondary movement) arrivals of asylum seekers who, tired of their forced entrapment in Greece, once more reached the city in a last, desperate attempt at continuing their journey onwards into Europe via “other” means. Throughout this process, they resided in two of the city’s derelict factories, becoming virtually invisible and forgotten by the official system of protection (i.e. the state), while exposed to daily living conditions that only served to further aggravate their health. That is, up to mid-May 2018, when following a series of incidents between the port’s authorities and refugees, a belated transfer of the latter was undertaken by the state. In this context, Patra represented a devastating example of the effects that the overall policy pursued following the Statement’s implementation in both Greece and Europe has had on vulnerable persons’ lives, and accordingly its selection as a destination was deemed mandatory.

Preliminary Findings

More than two years have passed since the much debated and controversial implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement. That is, more than two years during which the Greek

system of border reception has largely remained inadequate and ever-bound by the aspirations set forth in the Statement (i.e. obstructing journeys and externalizing international responsibilities), adversely affecting the lives of third-country nationals and stateless persons seeking protection in Europe.

At times, asylum seekers are denied access to the very mechanisms charged with ensuring their first steps towards protection (i.e. reception procedures), through clear-cut arbitrary and illegal means aimed at their “off-the-grid” deportation (**push-backs**). At others, this denial takes the form of significant delays, highly pertinent on individual characteristics (e.g. nationality) and manifesting in the form of an initial, yet once more highly arbitrary, detention. Indeed, detention has been routinely used at the **Evros** land border as a means of “crowd control,” with Pre-Removal Centers –that is closed, detention facilities in theory reserved for the expulsion of “illegal aliens”– having transformed into waiting zones where the desperate patiently –albeit, perhaps, fruitlessly– await for their salvation (**pre-RIC detention**).

Yet even upon their reception and incorporation into the mechanics of protection (reception and asylum), asylum seekers are once more faced with denial. A denial, amounting to the only constant is their lives being their ongoing exclusion from the right to be free and equal human beings. Forced to remain at the fringes of society (**detention** and **restriction of liberty**), in living conditions that strip them of their dignity and at times very humanity, they await in limbo for their acceptance in a continent that has largely been treating their lives as numbers. All the while, they lack both effective knowledge of the reasons for their exposure to such diverse and punitive-like measures, as well as access to crucial, for their wellbeing services, such as healthcare or education.

As a result, many find themselves in an increasingly deteriorating state of mind, with some choosing to further risk their lives by once more placing their trust in smugglers. Indeed, as this situation has increasingly become an established reality of the Greek/European system of reception of asylum seekers at the (Greek) borders, what began as a so-called “Refugee Crisis” is perhaps becoming more of a phenomenon; a phenomenon whereby persons fleeing persecution and/or destitution are “welcomed” in conditions that only serve to further devastate their already traumatized lives.¹¹

¹ European Council, *EU-Turkey statement*, 18 March 2016 [media release], 18 March 2016, <<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18/eu-turkey-statement/>>, last accessed 15 March 2018.

² Hellenic Republic, *Law No. 4375 of 2016 on the organization 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 [Greece]*, 3 April 2016, <<http://www.refworld.org/docid/573ad4cb4.html>>, last accessed 15 March 2018.

³ Greek Council for Refugees, ‘Country Report: Greece’, *asylum information database (aida)* [website], March 2018 update, pp.66-72, <<http://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/greece>>, last accessed 30 March 2018.

⁴ At the start of the “crisis”, new arrivals were for the most part “managed” through the massive solidarity movement that erupted in the of 2015 throughout Greece. For more, see D. Avgeri, et. al., ‘Balkan Refugee Trail: a Pathway for Solidarity’, Greek Council for Refugees [website], July 2017, <<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B8TP-HAgPft-ejl1akxGS0d0Vk0/view>>, last accessed 29 March 2018, pp.13-25.

⁵ European Union: Council of the European Union, *Directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and Council of 26 June 2013 laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection (recast)*, 29 June 2013, OJ L. 180/96 -105/32; 29.6.2013, 2013/33/EU, <<http://www.ref-world.org/docid/51d29db54.html>>, last accessed 15 March 2018.

⁶ For a complete list of interviews with third parties see Annex I (list of interviews/region).

⁷ A daily breakdown of arrivals per island, as well as numbers of residents per accommodation place and RIC can be found on the Hellenic Republic’s Ministry of Digital Policy, Telecommunications, and Information Policy Website at: <http://mindigital.gr/index.php/%CF%80%CF%81%CE%BF%CF%83%CF%86%CF%85%CE%B3%CE%B9%CE%BA%CF%8C-%CE%B6%CE%AE%CF%84%CE%B7%CE%BC%CE%B1-refugee-crisis>.

⁸ To be noted, the routes renewed importance can more accurately be understood not so much by the number of those being recorded as having crossed the borders, as much as by the number of those not managing to do so due to being apprehended at the Turkish side. This is highlighted by the fact that, although in 2016 Turkish authorities had reportedly apprehended an estimated 7,500 persons while trying to (irregularly) cross the Evros border, throughout 2017 the same number had nearly tripled (**20,700**). UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), ‘Desperate Journeys (January-September 2017 update)’, *UNHCR operational portal* [online database], 23 November 2017, p.2., <<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/60865>>, last accessed 15 March 2018.

⁹ Data are based on arrests made at the Greek-Turkish land borders by the Hellenic Police, on charges of illegal/undocumented entry. A breakdown per year (and per region) can be found at: http://www.astynomia.gr/index.php?option=ozo_content&lang=%27..%27&per-form=view&id=70776&Itemid=1240&lang=.

¹⁰ Hellenic Republic, Greek Ministry of Citizen Protection, *Δελτίο Τύπου σχετικά με δημοσίευμα ιστοσελίδας, που αναφέρεται σε επαναπροωθήσεις προσφύγων/μεταναστών στον Έβρο* [Press Release regarding a website publication, which referred to refoulements of refugees/migrants at Evros], 30 January 2018, <http://www.mopocp.gov.gr/index.php?option=ozo_content&lang=&per-form=view&id=6306&Itemid=653>, last accessed 15 March 2018. To be noted, there is a significant divergence between the data provided in this press release, and the relevant data provided by the Hellenic Police (5,677 arrests on charges of illegal entry at the Evros land border for 2017).

¹¹ Characteristically, as per personnel of the Hellenic Center for Disease Control (KEELPNO), which undertook the provision of medical services in most RICs during the summer of 2017, between August and up to the time of our respective visits, some 60-70% of the beneficiaries they had seen in **Lesvos**, and 90%, in **Kos**, exhibited some sort of vulnerability or another. These included substance addictions, physical disabilities, chronic diseases, psychological issues, maltreatment, broken bones, skin conditions, and many psychological (e.g. post-traumatic stress disorders) and neurologic issues (e.g. epilepsies). Information acquired through interviews with KEELPNO staff in Lesvos and Kos on 15 December 2017 and 12 January 2018, respectively, as well as the RIC sub-Director in Moria, Lesvos, on 15 December 2017.

Access to the Territory and Reception

The law dictates that upon irregular entry to the Greek territory, all newcomers are to be ‘*immediately transferred under the responsibility of the police or port authorities...to a Reception and Identification Center*’ (article 14(1) of L. 4375/2016).¹²

This, to be noted, is a pre-requisite for the proper reception of newcomers and thus for ensuring their access to a set of services and rights (e.g. asylum). These include medical examinations and the provision of healthcare and psychosocial support, the provision

of proper information on rights and obligations (e.g. right to asylum), referrals of asylum seekers to the competent Regional Asylum Office (RAO), and the referral of vulnerable persons to proper accommodation and support.¹³ All, in turn, form the basis for the first-line reception of third-country nationals and stateless persons and are to be performed under the competence of the Reception and Identification Service (RIS),¹⁴ which is also responsible for the management of the RICs.

Despite the importance of the aforementioned procedure, however, throughout the research it became apparent that asylum seekers, who undergo highly perilous journeys in hopes of reaching a safe (European) haven, have been systematically excluded from accessing reception. This exclusion has at times taken the form of administrative delays, on account of which asylum seekers have been unjustifiably stripped of their liberty, while at others it has manifested through much more blatant illegalities, leading to their arbitrary deportation; a practice, furthermore, from which even recognized refugees and/or registered asylum seekers have not been spared.¹⁵

Push-backs/Refoulement

On the 20th of December 2017 we visited the Greek-Turkish land borders of **Evros**, with the aim of assessing reception conditions at the local RIC (RIC at Fylakio, Evros). On the very same day, a man (national of Pakistan) was reported dead after allegedly having been forcefully returned to Turkey.

As per the newspaper article, the man, alongside an unspecified number of other third-country nationals (citizens of Pakistan and Afghanistan) was forced to cross the freezing (**Evros**) river in the context of an arbitrary deportation enacted by the Greek security forces. Following their (re)entry into Turkey, the group was apprehended by the Turkish authorities and the man was transferred at a nearby hospital, as he had been suffering from symptoms of hypothermia. He passed away soon afterwards.¹⁶

Incidents such as these raise serious legal concerns as to not only the conduct of law enforcement authorities, but also their ultimate consequences with respect to the protection of the very lives of vulnerable individuals and groups –lives, that is, which law enforcement authorities are ultimately responsible to protect. Crucially, however, this was not an isolated incident.

On the contrary, push-backs and/or other types of arbitrary deportations, potentially amounting to refoulement and inter alia enacted against families with children that had requested asylum upon arrival in Greece, have on multiple occasions come to light in the region of **Evros**.¹⁷ They have also consistently come to the attention of both GCR and other organizations, including the Hellenic League for Human Rights (HLHR) and Amnesty International,¹⁸ and consequently raised to the authorities. To this day, however, the latter have failed to attribute the matter its proper importance, with the competent Ministry of Citizen Protection more recently (June 2017 and again in January 2018) avoiding to reply with anything more than generic answers to the allegations.¹⁹

This, to be noted, was despite affirmations on the incidents' occurrence coming from a current MP and former Minister of the ruling government.²⁰

That being said, push-backs have seemingly not only been enacted on a systematic basis, but also on an escalating one during the past two years.²¹ Indicatively, between March and October 2016, and as part of the EVI-MED programme,²² GCR conducted a research during which some 300 in-depth surveys were completed by a similar number of participants in the region of Attiki (Athens and surrounding areas) and Thessaloniki. One of the survey's questions, which were not utilized in the final report, related to the number of attempts participants had made at crossing the borders towards Greece, before being allowed to stay/request asylum. Though the survey was not Evros-specific, 89 participants had at the time replied having attempted to enter more than once (average of 2-3 times).

Throughout 2017 and the beginning of 2018, on the other hand, and in the context of an October 2017-January 2018 mission to **Evros** and the broader region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, GCR documented 31 such cases, amounting to a total of 47 asylum seekers who had fallen victims of arbitrary deportation upon entry in Greece. As per their statements, at first and following their arrest (for illegal entry), they had been stripped of their belongings (phones, IDs etc.) and transferred to detention facilities where, following a short stay (hours-days), they had been once more transferred – by uniformed, armed and hooded personnel (police and military-type/resembling outfits)– to the Evros river banks. From there, they, alongside an as of yet unspecified, yet as per their accounts well exceeding the 200 mark, number of asylum seekers –including vulnerable ones and families– had been boarded in small vessels and sent back to Turkey. To be noted, several of the victims had to engage in these desperate attempts on multiple occasions (average of 3 attempts at entering Greece), with some having to enter Greece no less than 7 and even 10 times, before being granted access to asylum.²³ Lastly, a large majority of them were nationals of so-called “top refugee producing countries” (Syria and Afghanistan) or of countries where forced displacement is an increasingly concerning reality (i.e. Yemen).²⁴

Arbitrary returns of registered asylum seekers at the Evros border

Between August 2016 and December 2017, out of 113 cases undertaken by GCR's Evros-based lawyer, two reported having previously fallen victims of arbitrary expulsion at the hands of the Greek police. The cases concerned a Syrian male, and a highly vulnerable, pregnant, Algerian female, both of who –at the time of the reported deportation– were registered asylum seekers in Greece.

In the former's case, the man had entered Greece in February 2016 and, after three months of detention at the Fylakio Pre-Removal Center, finally succeeded in having his asylum request registered. As part of the (at the time) ongoing relocation scheme, he was accepted for relocation by another MS, and was preparing to begin his new life. Soon afterwards, he was apprehended in Alexandroupoli by the Greek police, without his documents (asylum seeker's card), which he had lost.

In the latter's case, the woman had entered Greece alongside her mother and minor sister, all of whom had applied for asylum at the Thessaloniki RAO. For reasons unknown, a few days before her scheduled interview at said RAO, she was found in Alexandroupoli, where she was apprehended by the Greek police.

As per their statements, both applicants were, following their apprehension, forcefully returned to Turkey, alongside an unspecified number of mostly Syrian applicants, following which they both managed to re-enter Greece (again, via Evros).

The first applicant in November 2016, alongside four other vulnerable persons, all of whom passed away during the journey. Upon (re)entry, and despite his still being a registered asylum seeker in Greece, he was once more apprehended and detained; albeit, this time, at the Pre-Removal Center in Xanthi. In the meantime, his relocation was indefinitely postponed.

The second applicant was found sleeping in the streets of Istanbul/Constantinople a short time after her deportation. Upon (re)entry, she was once more apprehended and detained at the local RIC (Fylakio). Following GCR's intervention, she was released and the Prosecutor was notified of her case by the Asylum Service.

Pre-RIC Detention

Notwithstanding the gravity of the aforementioned incidents, which have for years necessitated a full-scale, state-led investigation, increasing arrivals at the **Evros** land border have further added to the highly arbitrary and highly concerning set of practices observed in the region.

Specifically, the RIC (Reception and Identification Center) at Fylakio, Evros, is the sole such facility in the region and one, furthermore, whose jurisdiction extends well beyond the Evros municipality to cover the totality of the Geographical District of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace. The RIC, however, has a designated capacity of only 240 places. Accordingly, it has been consistently struggling to cope with the timely registration and accommodation of increasingly numerous arrivals during the past year; an issue which was further exacerbated at the beginning of 2018, as suffice to consider that, within the context of a continued upward trend of Evros-based arrivals since the beginning of the new year, April, alone, saw nearly 3,000 asylum seekers entering Greece's northern borders. As a result, upon arrival and instead of being transferred to the RIC –as per the law– newcomers have, at first, been detained in one of the local Pre-Removal Centers, police precincts and/or border police outposts, while awaiting for a place to become available in the RIC, so as for the latter to become able to process them.

Timeframes of this “Pre-RIC detention,” as this practice has been aptly termed, range widely, with general periods seemingly revolving around a day's to a month's detention.²⁵ As per GCR's observations in the region, however, these (pre)detention times may very well extend to two and at times even three months. That is months during which newcomers are not properly registered nor examined for any potential (and especially less visible) vulnerabilities. They are instead simply detained and left to wait in limbo, while exposed to inadequate and degrading living conditions.

This, to be noted, is a practice with no grounding in law, whatsoever, and in itself constitutes a violation of the rights and dignity of all newcomers, irrelevantly of status and reasons for undertaking the perilous journey towards Europe. It is more so problematic, however, considering that the vast majority of Evros-based arrivals, as we were *inter alia* informed during our visit (20-22 December, 2017), are either *prima facie* refugees (Syrians, Iraqis) or asylum seekers.²⁶ Lastly, it is a practice ripe with elements of discrimination, based, amongst others, on persons' visible vulnerabilities and/or their nationalities.

As per information provided by the RIS, for instance, and confirmed by both GCR's and UNHCR's observations in the region,²⁷ when (pre)detained, Syrian, Iraqi nationals and more broadly “high recognition rate nationalities”, as well as families, single-headed households and unaccompanied minors (regardless of nationality), have in general and *de facto* been prioritized for transfer to the RIC, in order to undergo reception.²⁸ Thus in their cases Pre-RIC detention times have tended to end anywhere from within a couple of days to a month at most. For the remainder of third-country nationals/non-nationals, however, –including those whose vulnerabilities have not been properly assessed due to ongoing gaps in specialized, medical, personnel– Pre-RIC detention times have often exceeded two, at times reaching even three months, without their ultimate transfer to the RIC necessarily leading to the desired outcome (i.e. access to asylum).

Sample case of Pre-RIC detention in Evros

Case of male asylum seeker (national of Pakistan), suffering from acute psychological problems. The applicant was held in detention at a regional Pre-Removal Center for three months, prior to his being registered (nationality screening) at the Fylakio RIC. He's registration was hastily conducted in less than a day, leading to an improper medical assessment and a complete lack of any psychological assessment whatsoever. This was despite his having clear marks of self-harm (suicide attempts) and his being, as per his statements, a victim of torture. After this rudimentary registration, he was once more detained, first, at the Fylakio Pre-Removal Center, and then, at that of Xanthi. Throughout this time, he was never provided nor referred to appropriate medical-psychological assistance, nor was he given the chance to register his asylum request before the competent asylum office.

To be noted, a similar practice has been observed on the island of **Kos** as well, with respect to asylum seekers who have been transferred there from other islands. Namely, following the RIC's operationalization in June 2016, **Kos** has in principle functioned as a central hub for the reception of asylum seekers arriving in a number of other islands of the Southern Aegean (Crete, Anafi, Karpathos, Kastelorizo, Simi and Kalimnos), where such a facility (i.e. RIC) is not available. Accordingly, procedure dictates that following their arrival and apprehension at one of these islands, newcomers are to be transferred to Kos, where their reception and overall asylum procedures are to commence.

Despite this, however, following the Kos Pre-Removal Center's operationalization in late March-early April 2017, there have been cases of new arrivals that have been immediately transferred to and detained there, without previously having undergone registration and identification procedures at the RIC.²⁹ This has been especially the case for applicants arriving in other islands (e.g. Symi and Kastolorizo), who upon being transferred to Kos have been arbitrarily sent to the Pre-Removal Center, seemingly for deportation. One such case regarded an unspecified number of persons transferred from Symi (after a 15-days period of detention), amongst whom a vulnerable, unaccompanied, minor. Following their transfer to Kos, and despite not being registered nor assessed for any potential vulnerability, instead of the RIC they were sent to the island's (**Kos**) Pre-Removal Center. Similar was the case with another such transfer, albeit this time from Kastelorizo. The transfer regarded a group of 20 persons, 16 of whom (1 Syrian, the rest Iraqi-Kurds) had expressed their will to apply for asylum at Kastelorizo –a will that was not properly recorded. For reasons unknown, upon their transfer to Kos they were divided into two groups, with the first being transferred to the RIC to undergo reception, and the second to the Pre-Removal Center.

“If the application for international protection is submitted before a non-competent authority [i.e. police, coast guard and RIS], that authority is obliged to notify promptly the competent Receiving Authority [i.e. Asylum Service] using the most appropriate way and to refer the applicant to it”. (Article 36 (4) of Greek L. 4375/2016)

Lastly, albeit in a different context (non-availability of official structure), up to June 2016, when the **Kos** RIC entered into function and could thus start accommodating newcomers, many refugees, asylum seekers and migrants alike were inter alia kept detained in cells found at the 2nd Regional Police Directorate of Dodekanisa (B’ Αστυνομική Διεύθυνση Δωδεκανήσου). Detention, as is most often the case in such facilities, took place under inhumane living conditions (e.g. 58 persons in 22 person capacity cells),³⁰ usually without or with very problematic access to a lawyer (e.g. no access to a phone), and for periods which at times reached and/or even exceeded the legally allowed period of three months.

Furthermore, and even though after the RIC’s operationalization formerly detained asylum seekers started gradually being transferred to the latter, this practice did not end. Rather, it continued well into the first months of 2017,³¹ only to start scaling down in February, and, as per information acquired during our visit,³² ultimately come to an end at some point in April of the same year (2017). Despite this, its effects have had far reaching repercussions for those unfortunate enough to arrive in **Kos** at the time.

Sample case in Kos

Case of male (Syrian), who was a victim of torture. He arrived in Kos in April 2016 and declared his will to apply for asylum. At the time the RIC was not yet operational, therefore the authorities seemingly deemed it necessary to initially keep him detained in the cells of the 2nd police Directorate of Dodekanisa. His asylum request was ultimately registered 6 months later, in November 2016, but for reasons unknown it was to be examined by the Regional Asylum Office (RAO) of Rhodes, instead of the one found in Kos. Throughout this time he was kept solely in detention, without undergoing any vulnerability assessment, as it was considered that his arrival prior to the local RIC’s operationalization, made the latter (RIC of Kos) non-competent for his case. More than 2 years following his arrival, in May 2018, and after two negative decisions on the admissibility of his claim, he has yet to undergo a vulnerability assessment, while the examination of his case (currently before the Administrative Court of Appeal) has been postponed for 2019.

¹² Something which can be further performed by the RIS, if the latter (i.e. police and port authorities) are unable to conduct the transfer and/or in order to ensure the '*prompt and timely transfer of persons belonging to vulnerable groups...*' (article 14(1) of L. 4375/2016).

¹³ As per article 14(8) of L.4375/2016, persons belonging to vulnerable groups include: a) Unaccompanied minors, b) Persons who have a disability or suffering from an incurable or serious illness, c) The elderly, d) Women in pregnancy or having recently given birth, e) Single parents with minor children, f) Victims of torture, rape or other serious forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence or exploitation, persons with a post-traumatic disorder, in particular survivors and relatives of victims of shipwrecks, g) Victims of trafficking in human beings.

¹⁴ For an exact set of the RIS's responsibilities, see Hellenic Republic, Ministry of Migration Policy, General Secretariat of Reception, 'Procedures', Reception and Identification Service [website], <<http://www.firstreception.gov.gr/content.php?lang=en&id=4>>, last accessed 15 March 2018.

¹⁵ Indicatively, in November 2016, a Syrian male, who had been recognized as a refugee in Germany, had come to Greece's north-eastern borders (Evros region) in search of his little brother; a brother whom he had lost track of. Upon contact with the Hellenic police, as per a newspaper article published in *efsyn* ("editors' newspaper"/«Εφημερίδα των Συντακτών»), he was stripped of his belongings (refugee card, German residence permit, refugee passport and cell phone), and after being detained for an unspecified amount of time with another 50 persons (at least one, of whom, reportedly a recognized refugee as well), they were all boarded in small vessels by men of the Greek police and returned to Turkey. See D. Aggelidis, 'Μου πήραν τα χαρτιά, με πήγαν στο ποτάμι και με πέρασαν απέναντι...' [They took my papers, they took me to the river and they took me to the other side...], *efsyn*, 12 February 2018, <<https://www.efsyn.gr/arthro/moy-piran-ta-hartia-me-pigan-sto-potami-kai-me-perasan-apenanti>>, last accessed 15 March 2018.

¹⁶ TRT, 'Πακιστανός πάγωσε μέχρι θανάτου μετά την απέλαση του από την Ελλάδα' [Pakistani froze to death following his expulsion from Greece], *TRT (Turkish Radio and Television)*, 20 December 2017, <<http://www.trt.net.tr/greek/balkania-kupros/2017/12/20/pakistanos-pagose-mekhri-thanatou-meta-ten-apelase-tou-apo-ten-ellada-871975>>, last accessed 15 March 2018.

¹⁷ Indicatively, see D. Aggelidis, 'Ντοκουμέντο βίαιης επαναπροώθησης' [Record of forcible return], *efsyn*, 23 June 2017, <<http://www.efsyn.gr/arthro/ntokoymento-viaiis-epanaproothisis>> and '«Εξπρές του μεσονυκτίου» στο Διδυμότειχο' ["Midnight Express" at Didymoticho], *efsyn*, 7 June 2017, <<http://www.efsyn.gr/arthro/expres-toy-mesonyktioy-sto-didymoteiho>>, (both) last accessed 15 March 2018; M., Mylonas, 'Δεύτερη σοβαρή καταγγελία για παράνομη επαναπροώθηση Τούρκων στον Έβρο' [Second serious complaint on illegal refoulement of Turks in Evros], *Athens Voice*, 5 June 2017, <http://www.athensvoice.gr/politics/357512_deyteri-sovari-kataggelia-gia-paranomi-epanaproothisi-toyrkon-ston-evro>, last accessed 15 March 2018.

¹⁸ Hellenic League for Human Rights, *Coordinated refoulements to Turkey?* [press release], 29 May 2017, <<http://www.hlhr.gr/en/coordinated-refoulements-turkey/>>, last accessed 20 March 2018, and Amnesty International, 'Amnesty International Report 2015/16: The State of the World's Human Rights', *Amnesty International* [website], 23 February 2016, p.168, <<https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/POL1025522016ENGLISH.PDF>>, last accessed 20 March 2018.

¹⁹ D., Aggelidis, 'Ο κ. Τόσκας και η διαπίστωση του αυτονόητου' [Mr. Toskas and the ascertainment of the self-evident], *efsyn*, 24 July 2017, <<http://www.efsyn.gr/arthro/o-k-toskas-kai-i-diapistosi-toy-aytonoitoy>>, accessed last accessed 15 March 2018; F., Labridi, 'Απάντηση Τόσκα για τις αποκαλύψεις του Tvxs.gr' [Toskas's reply on the revelations made by Tvxs.gr], *tvxs*, 30 January 2018, <<http://tvxs.gr/news/ellada/apantisi-toska-gia-tis-apokalypseis-toy-tvxs>>, last accessed 15 March 2018.

²⁰ Proto Thema, 'Καταγγελία από Φίλη: Έχουν γίνει επαναπροωθήσεις Τούρκων στον Έβρο από μασκοφόρους' [Denouncement by Filis: There have been forced returns of Turks at Evros [made] by masked men], *Proto Thema*, 20 June 2017, <<https://www.protothema.gr/politics/article/689967/nikos-filis-ta-pleonasmata-35-simainoun-skliiri-litotita>>, last accessed 15 March 2018; CNN Greece, 'Απάντηση Θεοδωράκη σε Φίλη για τις επαναπροωθήσεις στρατιωτικών στην Τουρκία' [Theodorakis's reply to Filis on the refoulement of military men to Turkey], *CNN Greece*, 20 January 2017, <<http://www.cnn.gr/news/politiki/story/85665/apantisi-theodoraki-se-fili-gia-tis-epanaproothiseis-stratiotikon-stin-toyrkia>> last accessed 15 March 2018.

²¹ Athens 9.84 newsroom, 'Β. Παπαδόπουλος στον Αθήνα 9.84: Φόβοι για νέο Φαρμακονήσι από τις παράνομες επαναπροωθήσεις' [V. Papadopoulos on Athens 9.84: Fears for a new Farmakonisi due to illegal returns at Evros], *Athens 9.84*, 9 February 2018, <<http://www.athina984.gr/2018/02/09/v>>

[papadopoulos-ston-athina-9-84-fovi-gia-neo-farmakonisi-apo-tis-paranomes-epanaproothisis/](#)), last accessed 29 March 2018.

²² A., d'Angelo et. al., *Mapping Refugee Reception In the Mediterranean: First Report of the Evi-Med Project*, 16 June 2017, <<https://evimedresearch.files.wordpress.com/2017/04/evi-med-first-report-final-16-june-2017.pdf>>, last accessed 29 March 2018.

²³ Greek Council for Refugees, *Reports of systematic pushbacks in the Evros region* [press release], 20 February 2018, <<http://gcr.gr/index.php/en/news/press-releases-announcements/item/790-anafores-gia-systimatikes-epanaproothiseis-ston-evro-apo-eksypiretoymenous-tou-esp>>, last accessed 15 March 2018.

²⁴ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 'Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2016', *UNHCR* [website], 19 June 2017, pp.16-17, <<http://www.unhcr.org/5943e8a34.pdf>>, last accessed 29 March 2018 and UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 'Yemen UNHCR Update, 15 - 31 January 2018', *reliefweb* [website], 31 January 2018, <<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Yemen%20Update%2015-31%20Jan%202018%20%28Final%29.pdf>>, last accessed 15 March 2018.

²⁵ Information acquired via interview with police representatives at the Pre-Removal Center at Fylakio, Evros, on 22 December 2017.

²⁶ As per information provided both by the Evros RIS and GAS (Directors of RIC and RAO, respectively), during our interviews (21 and 22 December 2017), 99% of non-Syrian and non-Iraqi nationals, when ultimately registered at the RIC, apply for asylum. Therefore, they are de facto asylum seekers who are forced in detention until their request can be heard.

²⁷ Interview with the Director of the RIC at Fylakio, Evros, on 21 December 2017, and interview with UNHCR staff at the Fylakio RIC, in Evros, on 22 December 2017.

²⁸ In the case of families and minors, to be noted, this prioritization takes place even if the RIC is beyond its capacity, which is the usual case.

²⁹ Interview with UNHCR staff at Kos Field Office on 11 January 2018.

³⁰ Others make references to even 62 detainees crammed in the cells, during the same time. See Fourla, D., M., 'Ασφυξία στα κρατητήρια του Α.Τ. Κω-Α.Κυδωνάκης: Δεν έχουν γίνει απελάσεις εδώ και 6 μήνες' [Suffocating conditions at the cells of the police precinct of Kos – A. Kidonakis: there have been no expulsions for 6 months], *Dimokratiki*, 16 March 2017, <<http://www.dimokratiki.gr/16-03-2017/asfixia-sta-kratitiria-tou-t-ko-kidonakis-den-echoun-gini-apelasis-edo-ke-6-mines/>>, last accessed 20 March 2018.

³¹ In January 2017, for instance, GCR undertook 8 such cases, all of whom were subsequently released, following GCR's intervention. Information acquired through GCR internal report on Kos, for January 2017.

³² Interview with Director of the 2nd Police Directorate of Dodekanisa, on January 12, 2018.

Detention and other means of restriction

As per UNHCR's Guidelines on the Applicable Criteria and Standards relating to the Detention of Asylum-Seekers and Alternatives to Detention, the "[...] *detention of asylum-seekers should be a measure of last resort, with **liberty being the default position***".³³ Similarly, as per the Reception Directive, detention of asylum seekers can only be enforced as a measure of last resort, and **only** "*if other less coercive alternative measures cannot be applied effectively*".³⁴

In spite of this, however, and notwithstanding the cases already mentioned in the preceding section, detention forms an integral and systemic aspect of the reception of asylum seekers at the Greek borders, and is enforced in a way that largely circumvents any safeguards dictated by law,³⁵ including the duty to examine less coercive alternatives.³⁶ If anything, detention seems to at times constitute the default position for applicants of international protection who, much in the spirit of the overall European deterrent policy

currently pursued, are usually detained in facilities aimed at processing the removal of “illegal aliens” (Pre-Removal detention Centers/Camps), instead of welcoming forcefully displaced –and not only by war– populations.

Excessive use of detention in Evros

As already mentioned, upon arrival at the Evros land borders with Turkey, refugees and asylum seekers are, at first and prior to undergoing any kind of reception procedures, forced in detention. For most, however, this detainee status goes well beyond the initial waiting period for accessing (first-line) reception.³⁷

Specifically, upon their ultimate transfer to the RIC beneficiaries are once more faced with detention, both as part of their official registration and identification, and in the context of the examination of their asylum application. This is for a number of reasons, inter alia including the overall scarcity of alternative (open) temporary accommodation facilities in mainland Greece and a similar scarcity in appropriate shelters for unaccompanied minors. More importantly, however, the RIC at Fylakio, Evros remains, up to this day, the sole RIC throughout Greece functioning under a closed doors policy. Thus, throughout their Evros-based “reception” and accommodation, applicants are either forced to remain within a closed Registration and Identification camp, or at the various police precincts and Pre-Removal Centers scattered through the region which, themselves, are closed detention facilities reserved (in theory) for those to-be-deported.

In this context, timeframes of this prolonged detention, as well as the detention facility ultimately used, are both subject to issues pertaining to an applicant’s (mostly visible) vulnerabilities and their nationalities. Thus as a rule and up to the point of our visit in December 2017, the RIC at Fylakio Evros had been reserved for the detention of primarily vulnerable applicants and groups, as well as for “high recognition rate” nationalities (mainly Syrians and Iraqis). The Pre-Removal Centers, on the other hand, were used for the detention of asylum seekers belonging to so-called “low-recognition rate” nationalities (especially Pakistan) and/or for those asylum seekers whose less visible vulnerabilities had not been (properly) assessed.

Based on this “allocation of spaces”, adult, vulnerable applicants and Syrian and Iraqi nationals were as a rule detained for up to the legally allowed period, in the context of their registration (maximum of 25 days). A period, following which they would either be transferred to appropriate accommodation sites (families and single-headed households) or, faced with the prospects of seemingly indefinite detention, would abstain from applying for asylum (Syrians and Iraqis), instead choosing to try their chances at protection elsewhere (usually, Thessaloniki). Unaccompanied minors, on the other hand, from an initial 3-months period of detention would, at the time of our visit (20-22 December 2017), be detained for average periods of 5 to 6 months, due to ongoing Greek-wide deficiencies in the availability of suitable shelters.

For the rest, –including applicants who may have been improperly assessed as non-vulnerable due to ongoing gaps in specialized, medical, personnel– the only thing changing between their registration and the completion of their asylum procedure (i.e. on average

6 months, on top of any Pre-RIC detention time) was their in-between transfer to and from the RIC (for registration and asylum-examination purposes) and back to their pre-removal holding cells.³⁸

Sample case in Evros

Case of female applicant (Tunisian) who was a victim of domestic violence and was suffering from Diabetes (I). She was apprehended at Evros in the summer of 2016 (August) and was registered as an asylum seeker in September of the same year. Despite her vulnerability, which led to her constantly being transferred to the Didimoticho hospital and to a short-term hospitalization at the general public hospital of Alexandroupoli, she remained in detention at the Pre-Removal Center at Fylakio, Evros, for three months.

Discriminatory detention on the islands

Leaving aside any systemic deficiencies (e.g. lack of accommodation spaces) which, in themselves, still provide no justification for the detention of persons fleeing acts of persecution (amongst which, detention itself), a highly systematized and arbitrary practice of detention has been similarly and seemingly regularly enforced at the island borders, as well. Based on this practice (so-called “pilot project”), which was reportedly launched and enforced by the Greek police as far back as October 2016,³⁹ island newcomers consisting of single, non-vulnerable, men of so-called “low-recognition rate” nationalities have, upon arrival, been as a rule immediately detained.⁴⁰

Based on GCR’s field-based experience, as well as interviews/discussions held during our visits in both **Kos** and **Lesvos**, by early January 2018 this was a very much an ongoing and established practice,⁴¹ seemingly exceptionally not enforced only when conditions of congestion would also be reflected in the non-availability of detention spaces. What is more, as of October 2017 the same discriminatory principle also started applying to Syrian asylum seekers, while at some unspecified point in time and up to our visit in **Lesvos** (11-15th December 2017), Iraqi nationals had further been added to its victims.

As for the justification, allegedly this discriminatory type of detention has been enforced on the basis that some applicants merely apply for asylum in order to “*delay or frustrate the enforcement of a return decision*”, and thus within the premises of the Law.⁴² As it has been on multiple occasions observed, however, “*this reasoning is being used to detain individuals immediately upon arrival in Greece, before they have even completed their initial registration*”.⁴³ Therefore, in practice, it amounts to a prejudiced treatment of asylum seekers on the basis of their nationality and/or gender, and

on an unsubstantiated preconception of some, as “economic migrants”, others (e.g. Syrians), as inextricably bound by the clauses of the Statement, and both deemed returnable (or “bogus asylum seekers”) before any individualized examination of their cases can even take place.⁴⁴

Furthermore, and though this “pilot project” has been allegedly enforced only against single, healthy, men, in both islands (**Kos** and **Lesvos**) a lack of proper vulnerability screening for these individuals was observed.⁴⁵ As a result, there have been cases of highly vulnerable persons, suffering from acute psychological issues (e.g. suicidal tendencies) either prior to their arrival in Greece or, most worryingly, following their detention, that have been treated in this way.⁴⁶ Lastly, and on top of that, in both **Kos** and **Lesvos** these arbitrarily detained asylum seekers would at first, when called before the asylum service for their interviews, be treated as less than criminals, as the police would transfer them at the competent RAO without even removing their handcuffs.⁴⁷

It is to be stressed that this highly arbitrary and discriminatory treatment, which inter alia also contravenes the very foundations of the Geneva Convention,⁴⁸ amounts to a highly degrading and humiliating treatment enacted against applicants of international protection.

“The Contracting States shall apply the provisions of this Convention to refugees without discrimination as to race, religion or country of origin.” Article 3 (non-discrimination) of convention and protocol relating to the status of refugees

Conditions of Detention

On the 22nd of December 2017 and the 10th of January 2018, respectively, we visited the Pre-Removal detention Center at Fylakio, **Evros**, and the Pre-Removal detention Center at Pyli, **Kos**. That is, two of the main border facilities where third country nationals and stateless persons are detained as part of both their asylum procedures and of the Pre-RIC detention practice examined in the preceding chapter.

Arguably, the Pre-Removal detention Center of **Kos**, which at the time housed some 82 persons from (primarily) Pakistan, Syria and Iraq,⁴⁹ was relatively to the rest of the border (and broader) detention facilities in somewhat adequate condition.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, significant issues still persisted, inter alia regarding the facility’s infrastructure (electric coverage and plumbing issues) and its ongoing non-separation between different categories of applicants (e.g. gender-based separation of single applicants or families). The latter, especially, had been an issue observed by both the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs in its May 2017 visit,⁵¹ as well as a parallel GCR mission conducted in December 2017,⁵² during which it was observed that the scarce female applicants detained in the facility were kept in the same space with single men, leading to their exposure to the risk of SGBV.⁵³

Further adding to the problem, the facility lacked both medical personnel and interpreters,⁵⁴ thus creating important risks to detainees who, not only did not benefit from effective access to healthcare, but were ultimately unable to make their needs adequately known to the mainly Greek-speaking personnel. It goes without saying that, in terms of access to services, the situation was the same at the **Evros** Pre-Removal detention Center, which similarly had no doctors and/or interpreters. In contrast to the **Kos** Pre-Removal Center, however, the Pre-Removal Center at Fylakio, **Evros**, is much more characteristic of detention conditions throughout Greece.

The Pre-Removal Center at Fylakio, **Evros**, –a gloomy facility formerly used as a factory– is composed of a desolated yard and a main building accommodating personnel and detainees. The detention wing has a designated capacity of 374 places, divided alongside five medium sized cells, and a sixth cell which was designated as the Center’s infirmary. Overall, the Center was clean but amenities were clearly inadequate to cover even the most basic of hygiene needs (e.g. 4 showers and toilets/ 50+ capacity cells). This was further aggravated by the scarce –if existent– provision of sanitary kits (e.g. toothbrushes), which, as is the case with most material provisions for asylum seekers and refugees throughout Greece, is ever dependent on private donations.

The detention wing was dimly lit, and no visibility existed towards applicants, as both inadequate lighting, and the thick blankets covering-surrounding their two-story beds from top to bottom, made any refugee inmate virtually hidden out of sight.⁵⁵ The building, in general, was in clear need of renovation, though this necessity was nowhere near more evident than in the so-called “infirmary”; a cell whose marked walls (inconsequential drawings, amongst others), exhumed a highly concerning atmosphere of despair, making what was supposed to function as a healing/resting place resemble more of an unsupervised asylum for the mentally troubled.

As per the officers we interviewed,⁵⁶ applicants were regularly provided access to fresh air. Based on GCR’s observations on the matter, however (e.g. frequent applicant complaints on the contrary), this was, at best, debatable. The fact that during our three-day visit we saw no one (not even the gate guards, who were entrenched inside the gate’s guard post to avoid the chilling cold) even remotely strolling through its yard –the facility’s sole open space, lying just in front of its ever **open** gates⁵⁷– further raises questions on the matter.

“Detained applicants shall have access to open-air spaces” (article 10(2) of Directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and Council of 26 June 2013 laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection (recast))

This, –as well as the Pre-Removal Center of **Kos**– to be reminded, is a facility where newcomers are detained both prior to and during the examination of their asylum claims for periods which, as we were informed by the local officers, may extend up to six

months;⁵⁸ six months on top of any Pre-RIC detention time they might have been forced to endure.

Geographical restriction

Notwithstanding the clear-cut detention cases underlined above, in terms of freedom of movement, the major issue for most “irregular” newcomers arriving at the Greek borders still remains their geographical restriction on the islands; a restriction inextricably tied to the Statement’s implementation that led to the radical alteration of the RICs’ “physiology”.

RICs (or “hotspots”), specifically, were first envisioned as far back as May 2015 and the European Agenda on Migration as a means ‘*to swiftly identify, register and fingerprint incoming migrants*’.⁵⁹ Therefore at the level of their conceptualization they were never meant to be anything more than short-term, transit facilities, aimed at filtering between persons in need of international protection and those arriving in Europe for other reasons (e.g. “*survival migrants*”).⁶⁰ Indeed, this was further reflected at the level of their implementation, –at least, in Greece– as suffice to say that on the 20th of March 2016 none of the five “hotspots” were fully operational, with that of **Kos** being the furthest away from its full operationalization (June 2016).⁶¹ Accordingly, when the Statement was brought into force, the RICs were barely able to fulfill their original aim, let alone undertake the accommodation of the thousands of asylum seekers that got trapped on the islands in its direct aftermath, or the thousands more that would thereafter arrive –even if in much diminished numbers.⁶²

Despite this, in the aftermath of the EU-Turkey Statement, and following a short period (up to the end of April-beginning of May 2016) during which they functioned as closed detention centers, the island RICs were transformed into a type of hybrid, open-for-some, closed-for-others, facilities, charged simultaneously with the reception, accommodation, and detention of inbound refugees and asylum seekers.⁶³ More so, since the Statement’s implementation the “restriction curb” has only spiraled upwards, leading to the consolidation of a trend (less liberty, more deterrence) which has only negatively impacted the lives of refugees and asylum seekers –not least, since it created the conditions of overcrowding on the islands, with results that will be examined in subsequent chapters.

In terms of consequences, for most newcomers this has meant the imposition of an initial period of detention/restriction of freedom within the RIC (up to 25 days), which is then followed by the imposition of a limitation of their freedom of movement on the islands throughout the duration of the examination of their (asylum) claim. Furthermore, and though vulnerable asylum seekers would at first, following assessment of their vulnerability, be exempted from this indefinite confinement, in December 2016 and reportedly following external pressures, they were also added to the list of stranded persons, not being allowed to leave the islands up to the completion of their asylum interview.⁶⁴ Since then, and as a rule, on top of the already indiscriminate restriction of freedom inside the RIC (up to 25 days) to which asylum seekers have been subjected, all –reportedly with the exception of vulnerable Syrian applicants⁶⁵– have similarly and

indiscriminately been further subjected to an ever prolonged restriction of freedom on the islands (after the 25 days).

To be noted, in the context of this limitation of their freedom, asylum seekers are, in theory, freely allowed to enter-exit their respective RICs' premises.⁶⁶ During our visits in both **Lesvos** and **Kos**, however, the following issue came to our attention. Namely, despite applicants' alleged freedom to move within the islands following their initial detention, this "freedom" is practically unattainable for the vast majority of them. For starters, public transportation on both islands was only available for limited hours and never available during afternoon and/or night hours. Transportation, furthermore, was for all intents and purposes unaffordable on a consistent basis, as the financial allowance provided to applicants remains marginally sufficient to cater even to some of their most basic needs (e.g. private healthcare, which forms a necessity due to ongoing gaps in the publicly-provided one, or clothes). Lastly, the number of available buses and the number of routes performed throughout their limited daily schedule between the RICs and other locations, were in no way sufficient to cover the hundreds (in Kos) and thousands (in Lesvos) of trapped asylum seekers, who were thus ultimately, albeit indirectly, forced to "enjoy" their freedom within the premises and/or surrounding areas of the respective RICs.⁶⁷

Therefore, it needs to be emphasized that despite their nominal non-detention on the islands, the vast majority of asylum seekers are still trapped under conditions highly similar to those of detention. It is not to wonder, then, why the Greek "hotspot" islands have been characterized as "*open prisons*".⁶⁸

"[The] Distinction between deprivation of liberty (detention) and lesser restrictions on movement is one of "degree or intensity and not one of nature or substance".⁶⁹

³³ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 'Detention Guidelines: Guidelines on the Applicable Criteria and Standards relating to the Detention of Asylum-Seekers and Alternatives to Detention', *ref-world* [website], 2012, <<http://www.refworld.org/docid/503489533b8.html>>, last accessed 20 March 2018.

³⁴ Article 8(2), Directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and Council of 26 June 2013 laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection (recast).

³⁵ Indicatively, see Council of Europe: Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT), *Report to the Greek Government on the visits to Greece carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 13 to 18 April and 19 to 25 July 2016* [website], 26 September 2017, pp.16-17, <<https://rm.coe.int/pdf/168074f85d>>, last accessed 20 March 2018 and Walter-Franke, M., 'Asylum Detention in Europe: State of Play and Ways Forward', *Jacques Delors Institut, Policy Paper 195*, 18 May 2017, p.14, <<http://www.institutdelors.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/asylumdetentionineurope-walter-jdib-may2017.pdf?pdf=ok>>, last accessed 20 March 2018.

³⁶ As aptly stated by the Global Detention Project, "*Greece's immigration detention practices more generally raise several concerns, including: the country's resistance to using alternatives to detention; its systematic detention of children; the issuing of detention orders that lack individual assessments; inadequate conditions of detention; and the use of police stations for immigration detention purposes*". Global Detention Project, 'Greece Immigration Detention' [online], *Global Detention Project* [website], January 2018 (updated), <https://www.globaldetentionproject.org/countries/europe/greece#_ftn8>, last accessed 20 March 2018.

³⁷ Also see, European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), 'What's in a name? The reality of

First "Reception" at Evros', *asylum information database (aida)* [website], February 2015, <<http://www.asylumineurope.org/sites/default/files/resources/eu-greece-ecre-evros.pdf>>, last accessed 20 March 2018.

³⁸ As per the time of publication (23 May 2018), the situation has largely remained unchanged, further aggravating due to the increase in Evros-based arrivals in 2018.

³⁹ Danish Refugee Council (DRC), 'Fundamental Rights and the EU Hotspot Approach', *Danish Refugee Council* [website], October 2017, p.21, <<http://www.statewatch.org/news/2017/nov/danish-refugee-council-fundamental-rights.pdf>>, last accessed 20 March 2018.

⁴⁰ Perhaps reflecting this trend, out of 5,424 asylum applications made in Greece throughout 2017 from asylum seekers found under administrative detention, top nationalities included citizens of Pakistan (3,247), Bangladesh (306), and Algeria (217). For more, see Greek Asylum Service (GAS), reply to a relevant request made by the Greek Council of Refugees on 3 January 2018 [online], February 2018, p.16, <<http://asylo.gov.gr/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/AIDA-Report-2018.pdf>>; Joint Agency Briefing Paper, 'Transitioning to a Government run Refugee and Migrant Response in Greece: a Joint Ngo roadmap for more fair and humane policies', *reliefweb* [website], December 2017, pp.5-6, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/greece_roadmap_oxfam_final.pdf>, last accessed 20 March 2018; European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), 'Interview: Asylum procedure based on nationality rather than on merit – the situation of Pakistani asylum applicants under the EU Turkey Deal', *European Council on Refugees and Exiles* [website], 8 December 2017, <<https://www.ecre.org/interview-asylum-procedure-based-on-nationality-rather-than-on-merit-the-situation-of-pakistani-asylum-applicants-under-the-eu-turkey-deal/>>, last accessed 20 March 2018.

⁴¹ Information acquired cumulatively through interviews with Caritas Hellas (13 December 2017), members of the Lesvos Municipality (12 December 2017), representatives of PIKPA (13 December 2017) and HIAS (14 December 2017) in **Lesvos**, and with UNHCR staff at the Kos Field Office (11 January 2018) and the staff of the Regional Asylum Office in **Kos** (12 January 2018).

⁴² Namely, in accordance with article 46 of L.4376/2016. For more on the grounds of detention and the deficiencies in their practical implementation, see Greek Council for Refugees, 'Country Report: Greece', *asylum information database (aida)* [website], March 2018 update, pp.148-153, <<http://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/greece>>, last accessed 30 March 2018.

⁴³ In January 2018 this "pilot project" allegedly ended. However, this seemingly pertained solely to its justification, as the practice, as such, has reportedly remained very much ongoing. Leete, L., 'January 2018 Report on Rights Violations and Resistance in Lesvos', *Legal Center Lesvos* [website], 10 February 2018, <<http://www.legalcentrelesvos.org/2018/02/10/january-2018-report-on-rights-violations-and-resistance-in-lesvos/>>, last accessed 20 March 2018.

⁴⁴ Also see Amnesty International, 'Amnesty International Report 2017/18: The State of the World's Human Rights', *Amnesty International* [website], 22 February 2018, <<https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/POL1067002018ENGLISH.PDF>>, last accessed 20 March 2018.

⁴⁵ Interview with PIKPA representative, in **Lesvos**, and UNHCR staff at **Kos** Field Office on 13 December 2017, and 11 January 2018, respectively.

⁴⁶ Interview with PIKPA representative, in Lesvos, on 13 December 2017.

⁴⁷ Also see Thomas-Davis, M., 'On Lesvos, police violence crushes refugees' peaceful resistance: justice for the Moria 35', *openDemocracy*, 15 January 2018, <<https://www.opendemocracy.net/can-europe-make-it/maya-thomas-davis/on-lesvos-police-violence-crushes-refugees-resistance-justice-f>>, last accessed 21 March 2018.

⁴⁸ UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 'Convention Relating and Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees', *UNHCR* [website], December 2010, <<http://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10.pdf>>, last accessed 26 March 2018.

⁴⁹ Since its date of operationalization, in March-April 2017, and up to the time of our visit, the Center had housed 772 persons, of whom 467 were nationals of Pakistan, 118 of Iraq, 56 of Syria, and the rest of other, mostly African, nationalities. Information acquired through interview with police representative at the Pre-Removal Center at Pyli, in Kos, on 10 January 2018.

⁵⁰ In itself, not an accomplishment, as overall detention conditions in Greece have consistently been characterized as inhumane and degrading, not least by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT). Indicatively, see Council of Europe: Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT), op.cit., p.14.

⁵¹ See European Parliament: Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs,

Mission Report following the LIBE Mission to Greece hotspots and Athens, 22 – 25 May 2017, European Parliament [website], 30 June 2017, p.17, <<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/136120/mission-report-greece.pdf>>, last accessed 26 March 2018.

⁵² In December 2017, GCR conducted a field mission at the Pre-Removal Center in Kos, consisting of 5 staff (lawyers and interpreters).

⁵³ At the time of our visit (December 10, 2017), the case was seemingly the same with the 2 families that were detained in the facility.

⁵⁴ As we were informed, interpretation would take place either through interpreters based at the nearby **Kos** RIC or via detainees themselves. Information acquired through interview with police representative at the Pre-Removal Center at Pyli, Kos, on 10 January 2018. In either case, this service was clearly insufficient, as it relied either on the ever scarce availability of RIC interpreters –who during our visit to the RIC (10-12 December 2017) could literally not catch their breath– or on the randomness of detainees’ knowledge of Greek.

⁵⁵ A frequently-encountered practice in prison facilities, where surrounding one’s bed with blankets *inter alia* provides a rudimentary sentiment of privacy.

⁵⁶ Interview with police representatives at the Pre-Removal Center at Fylakio, Evros, on 22 December 2017.

⁵⁷ It seems doubtful that the facility’s officers would leave the gates open, if detainees where provided access to fresh air, as the latter’s potential of “escaping”, under such circumstances, is a risk that can have severe repercussions against the former.

⁵⁸ Interview with police representatives at the Pre-Removal Center at Fylakio, Evros, on 22 December 2017.

⁵⁹ European Commission, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, *A European Agenda on Migration*, 13 May 2015, COM(2015) 240 final, p.6, <https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/sites/antitrafficking/files/communication_on_the_european_agenda_on_migration_en.pdf>, last accessed 29 March 2018.

⁶⁰ The term is borrowed from a Guardian article written by Alexander Betts. See A., Betts, ‘Human migration will be a defining issue of this century. How best to cope?’, *The Guardian International edition*, 20 September 2015, <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/sep/20/migrants-refugees-asylum-seekers-21st-century-trend>>, last accessed 27 March 2018.

⁶¹ Greek Council for Refugees, op.cit. p. 22; European Commission, Communication From The Commission To The European Parliament The European Council And The Council: Third Report on the Progress made in the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement, 28 September 2017, <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/news_corner/migration/com_2016_634_f1_other_act_863309.pdf>, last accessed 27 March 2018.

⁶² As per UNHCR data, by the end of May 2016, some 8,456 persons remained on the islands subject to the post-Statement new status quo. On the other hand, from 56,723, in 2015, arrivals on the Greek islands diminished to 173,450, in 2016, and 29,718, in 2017. UN High Commissioner for Refugees, ‘UNHCR Greece Factsheet January-May 2016’, *UNHCR* [website], 6 June 2016, p.2, <<http://donors.unhcr.gr/en/unhcr-greece-factsheet-january-may-2016/>>, last accessed 20 March 2018 and <<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean/location/5179>>.

⁶³ Greek Council for Refugees, ‘Country Report: Greece’, *asylum information database (aida)* [website], March 2017 update, p.100, <<http://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/greece>>, last accessed 30 March 2018.

⁶⁴ See Human Rights Watch (HRW), ‘World Report 2018 - European Union’, *refworld* [website], 18 January 2018, <<http://www.refworld.org/docid/5a61ee75a.html>>, last accessed 28 March 2018.

⁶⁵ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Aegean Islands Factsheet*, May 2017, p.3, <<https://refugeeobservatory.aegean.gr/sites/default/files/Aegean%20Islands%20Factsheet%20May%202017.pdf>>, last accessed 28 March 2018.

⁶⁶ Albeit there have been cases where the initial 25-day detention was extended due to administrative delays in providing applicants with legal documentation (e.g. police notes)

⁶⁷ Indeed, throughout our visits to **Kos** and **Lesvos**, and considering the number of asylum seekers stranded at each RIC, their presence in the islands’ inhabited areas was barely observable.

⁶⁸ Amnesty International, *Δηλώση Γαβριήλ Σακελλαρίδη Μετά την Επίσκεψη σε Καταυλισμούς στη Χίο και Λέσβο* [Statement of Gabriel Sakellaris following visit to camps in Chios and Lesbos] [press

release], 6 February 2018, <<https://www.amnesty.gr/news/press/article/21262/dilosi-gavriil-sakellar-idi-meta-tin-episkepsi-se-kataylismoys-sti-hio-kai>>, last accessed 28 March 2018.

⁶⁹ UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 'Detention Guidelines: Guidelines on the Applicable Criteria and Standards relating to the Detention of Asylum-Seekers and Alternatives to Detention', op. cit., p.9, also cites, <http://www.unhcr.org/505b10ee9.html> p.9, also cites *Guzzardi v. Italy*, Application no. 7367/76, Council of Europe: European Court of Human Rights, 6 November 1980, p.30. para.93, <<http://www.refworld.org/cases,ECHR,502d42952.html>>.

Gaps in Reception

Up to this point, what has been examined are some of the more blatant, yet systematic, violations of the rights of refugees and asylum seekers, in the context of practices that function in parallel to or at the expense of their “reception”. In the following sections, what will be examined is what the situation is for those asylum seekers whom, as per the law, undergo regular reception procedures at the Greek borders (Evros and the five “hotspot islands”).

Context of Reception

Much in line with the rationale and the overall “spirit” of the “hotspot approach” and the recast European Directive on the Reception of applicants for international protection, Articles 8(2) and 9 of the Greek L. 4375/2016 define the context of the initial reception of third country-nationals and stateless persons arriving –or residing– in the Greek territory without proper documentation.⁷⁰ Namely, said persons are upon arrival (or apprehension) to be submitted to Reception and Identification procedures, which are in principle to be performed under the responsibility of the RIS and amount to:

- a) *The registration of their personal data and the receiving and registering of fingerprints for those who have reached the age of 14,*
- b) *The verification of their identity and nationality,*
- c) *Their medical screening and the provision of any necessary care and psycho-social support,*
- d) *Informing them about their rights and obligations, in particular the procedure for international protection or the procedure for entering a voluntary return program,*
- e) *Attention to those belonging to vulnerable groups, in order to guide them to the appropriate, in each case, procedure and to provide them with specialized care and protection,*
- f) *Referring those who wish to submit an application for international protection to start the procedure for such an application,*
- g) *Referring those who do not submit an application for international protection or whose application is rejected while they remain in the RIC to the competent authorities for readmission, removal or return procedures.*

Based on these factors, it becomes evident that, at its core, this is an initial step aimed at not only identifying who is inside the country's territory (national security aspect), but primarily at ensuring that all persons who so wish to request international protection can do so effectively and in an equal-for-all manner (protection of persons fleeing persecution, and especially those in need of more specialized treatment).

That being said, element *g* pertains to persons in principle not wishing to apply for asylum, and therefore was not examined as part of the current research. Element *f*, on the other hand, is implemented by the book upon newcomers' arrival to the RICs which, as highlighted in previous sections, is marked by significant delays and arbitrariness. In terms of the remainder of elements *a* to *e*, throughout the research only those related to the security aspects of reception (i.e. identification and registration of personal data) were consistently performed in a timely manner (average of 2-3 days following arrival), with elements *c* to *e* (vulnerability screening and information) remaining highly problematic, despite some relative improvements on the matter.

Registration

Considering how prior to March 2016 many newcomers would leave the islands without being registered, –let alone assessed for potential vulnerabilities– this aspect of reception has since been the most consistently improved and upheld. Thus, to GCR's knowledge, as a rule following the Statement's implementation and **upon arrival at the RICs** (islands and Evros), newcomers have systematically been registered within periods not usually exceeding 2-3 days.⁷¹

Despite this, it needs to be pointed that, at least, at the Moria RIC, in **Lesvos**, the conditions under which newcomers were registered during our visit were in themselves verging towards the limit of degradation. Within the Moria RIC's internal fenced section, which is reserved for the registration, identification, fingerprinting and medical assessment of newcomers and residents alike, the small area reserved as a waiting zone for those waiting to undergo data verification procedures (conducted by Frontex), was more reminiscent of a paddock (short bars all around), rather than a dignified space for the initial reception of persons just previously rescued at sea. Perhaps, this was ultimately the reason why just outside the office/container, where identification was conducted, there was a "no pictures allowed" sign hanging by the door.

Provision of Information

Throughout 2016-2017, the provision of information to newcomers similarly became a consolidated practice of the Greek system of reception –in itself a marked improvement, considering the critical gaps characteristic of the immediate post-Statement period.⁷²

As a rule, and upon newcomers' transfer to the RICs, the RIS undertakes their initial briefing on rights and obligations, which is then followed-up by a second information session conducted by UNHCR's field-based teams (usually 10-15 minutes group sessions). A gap still persists during weekdays, since the unavailability of interpreters means that information can only be provided on Mondays, yet in itself this did not reportedly create any significant issues.⁷³ Despite this standardization of practices, however, information provision at the borders still remains highly problematic throughout all process and procedures that asylum seekers undergo for the duration of their RIC-based accommodation.

For starters, and especially **on the islands**, the timing under which information provision takes place has been reported as posing a direct impediment to effective understanding and assimilation.⁷⁴ That is, newcomers are frequently provided with information at too short intervals following their arrival (which, it should be reminded, was preceded by their previously having been literally rescued at sea), at a time when they are usually too confused and/or distressed to understand what is being said.

Secondly, conditions of overpopulation –especially in **Lesvos**– further impede effective communication. Thus at the Moria, RIC, which provides an indication for the situation in Chios and Samos, environmental parameters (overcrowding, constant shouts etc.), coupled with the RIS's ever overstretched capacity, adversely affect the quality of information. As such, and as per GCR's observations at the point of our visit in **Lesvos** (11-15 December 2017), the information provided to newcomers seemed to revolve around the provision of directions as to where (i.e. in which container) they would have to go in order to be identified, fingerprinted and registered, with the added "touch" of their being advised to be honest throughout the process.

Thirdly, based on GCR's observations in **Evros**, the language employed to inform beneficiaries about (especially) their rights, has at times been too fast-paced, specialized and/or technical in nature, seemingly not taking into account beneficiaries' levels of education, ages or broader sociopolitical backgrounds. More importantly, the information provided has tended to be solely factual (e.g. "your application has been rejected"), instead of explanatory, thus failing to accomplish the desired outcome, with adverse effects on the most vulnerable.

*"They don't explain to them [i.e. minor applicants] why their [asylum] application was rejected...[they just] give them a document written in Greek...stating their rights and obligations...it is the same with adults...but at least adults can ask questions...minors are generally more reserved [to do so]."*⁷⁵

Frequent changes in administrative procedures further complicate the matter as, indeed, "depending on when [someone arrives, they] undergo a different procedure".⁷⁶ And the list could go on, including the lack and/or scarcity of interpretation in some languages (mostly African-based), the overstretched capacity of available interpreters and significant gaps in the availability of intercultural mediators. Most crucially, however,

information was as a rule provided as a one-time commodity during arrival, and rarely with respect to what was to come following beneficiaries' eventual departure from the RICs (e.g. integration); in itself, a further factor exacerbating the feeling of unease felt at not knowing what the future might hold in store for them.

*"Information [provision] is highly incomplete. They arrive [on the island]...they undergo their [asylum] interviews, they await their decisions, and they are still not aware of what said decision might mean [for them]...for what reason, to begin with, they are accommodated here [at the RIC] ... [they are not informed] that this is just a [temporary] station [after which] they will then have to go elsewhere, where something new awaits them. The result is to have their [hopes and] expectations shattered"*⁷⁷

The issue, to be noted, is not one solely attributable to the reception system, as such, even if the latter's ongoing deficiencies in terms of the lack of ongoing provision of quality information further serves to exacerbate what is a highly sensitive matter.

Throughout their journey, asylum seekers and foreign nationals more broadly are exposed to a continuous stream of (mis)information, inter alia acquired through their contact with smugglers and smuggling networks, which offer them depictions of a "promised land" waiting for them just beyond the borders.⁷⁸ Thus many arrive with usually misguided pre-conceptions as to what awaits them upon arrival in Greece.⁷⁹ In other cases, misinformation presents itself in the face of seemingly local "do-gooders", as was the case with a beneficiary in **Kos**, who following his arrival went and bought an airplane ticket, after being led to believe that he could freely leave the island following his registration.⁸⁰ The result, of course, was his disillusionment after being informed that he had to return to the RIC, and that he had accordingly spent, perhaps, his last money, to buy a useless commodity. Lastly, refugees and asylum seekers have and/or create their own networks of information, which extend from their (container) roommates to friends, family member and/or fellow travelers that are found at different sections of the Greek borders and may be experiencing different facets of the reception and asylum procedures. Networks, that is, which may inter alia serve to enrich their understanding of the Greek system of reception and asylum, albeit subjectively (i.e. based on individual, and thus disparate experiences) and thus with the risk of further spreading inaccurate information.

An indicative example, provided to us in **Kos**,⁸¹ was that of two single women, friends and roommates, both of who vulnerable, one of which, however, also a documented victim of gender-based violence. With her increased vulnerability constituting RIC-based accommodation an even more unsafe place for her wellbeing, the latter was prioritized for transfer out of the RIC. The former, on the other hand, kept residing in the RIC, albeit now feeling not only that she had been left behind, but that somehow, and beyond her understanding, she had been discriminated against. As to the reason, this was because from what the two women could tell, in lack of adequate information (in

this case, on aspects of vulnerability), they were both women, they were both single, and, perhaps more importantly, they were both of the same nationality. They could therefore –in an arguably far wiser manner than the multi-divisional system of reception and asylum currently allows– see no distinguishing factors amongst them.

Crucially, in their cases, this disillusionment, emanating from the ongoing deficiencies in the systematic provision of qualitative information, may have manifested in the form of complaints and/or some level of frustration; in itself, an issue of concern, when considering the already overburdened psyche with which asylum seekers arrive at the borders. However, it becomes more so concerning when considering that, as has been observed by the European Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA),⁸² the usual outcome of inadequate information, especially in light of “*perceived unfair criteria for prioritisation of asylum claims together with overcrowding and long stays*”⁸³ –all of which are to this day characteristic of the Greek system of border reception– is the creation of tensions and/or violence (interethnic or otherwise). Similarly, it results in applicants’ losing their trust in the “official” system of reception-protection and, in turn, once more turning for “help” to smugglers.

As aptly put by the **Kos**, RIC Director, “*that is the bet...to make them understand that legal procedures are also the best procedures*”.⁸⁴ A bet, however, which as shall be exemplified in the final chapter of this project, is on many occasions –and perhaps increasingly– lost.

Vulnerability Screening/Assessment

The importance of vulnerability assessment (i.e. medical and psychosocial screening) lies in its not only being of foremost importance for ensuring that persons in need of more specialized assistance are detected at an early stage, following their arrival, but in its also being the sole means to ensure their full rights are respected. As per both national legislation and the Reception Directive, vulnerable persons are entitled to an expanded set of provisions, so as to ensure that throughout both their reception and asylum procedures they can enjoy their rights on an equal footing with non-vulnerable beneficiaries. For this reason, and not least due to the impossibility of guaranteeing the respect of said rights on the islands –as also acknowledged by the GAS⁸⁵– vulnerable persons are in principle exempted from the island-based geographical restriction, which in turn constitutes their early detection all the more important.

That being said, vulnerability screening has consistently been amongst the major –if not the foremost– issues faced by the Greek system of reception.⁸⁶ Up to the spring-summer of 2017, for instance, as a rule only persons displaying visible vulnerabilities (e.g. physically disabled, pregnant women) would be referred by the RIS to a medical assessment. Persons with less visible vulnerabilities (e.g. mental health problems), on the other hand, would be largely left on their own or, for the most part, referred to a

vulnerability assessment only following UNHCR's or other organizations' intervention.⁸⁷ Yet instead of improving, in the summer of 2017 (June) the situation further deteriorated.

Up to that point (end of May 2017), primary healthcare services in the RICs were provided by NGOs (e.g. Mdm), which, following the non-renewal of their contracts gradually started handing-over this activity to the state. As a result of this transition, which even at the time lacked sufficient planning, a huge gap was created in terms of both vulnerability assessment and the overall provision of healthcare services in the RICs.⁸⁸ To illustrate the extent of the problem, in July 2017, the RIC at Moria, **Lesvos**, was left with 2 doctors (one full-time, the other, part-time), 1 psychologist and 1 social worker, competent for conducting vulnerability assessments for a population at the time amounting to some 4,000 asylum seekers.⁸⁹ The RIC of **Kos**, on the other hand, throughout most of August was left with no official medical personnel, whatsoever,⁹⁰ meaning that no vulnerability assessment could take place. In turn, this led to a quasi-landslide effect, by not only actively endangering persons in need of immediate assistance, but also creating significant delays in the examination of their asylum applications, as the GAS –and rightly so– would not register their asylum claims if they had not previously undergone a medical assessment. In this context, prevalent gaps in the reception of asylum seekers only served to detrimentally affect what best practices may have been in place, as their cumulative, ultimate, effect, was the further entrapment of vulnerable persons on the islands.

The situation started somewhat ameliorating towards the end of August 2017, when personnel employed through KEELPNO (Hellenic Center for Disease Control & Prevention) was gradually deployed on the islands, thus inaugurating the state's belated takeover of healthcare provisions in the RICs. Since then, as we were informed at the island RICs of **Kos** and **Lesvos**, vulnerability screening (medical) has become a regular aspect of the reception process. Nevertheless, ongoing deficiencies in personnel (in **Kos**, for instance, only 1 KEELPNO doctor and 4 nurses were deployed in January 2018, for a population consisting of nearly 700 vulnerable asylum seekers),⁹¹ availability of space (in **Lesvos**, in December 2017, social workers in the RIC lacked any type of working space), backlogs created throughout the period of transition from NGO-led to state-led medical provisions, as well as matters of over-congestion, still prohibited (and do so to this day) the system from functioning in an effective manner.

Thus, at the time of our respective visits in both **Lesvos** and **Kos** (11-15 December 2017 and 10-12 January 2018, respectively), medical screening would as a rule take place a month following a person's arrival at the RIC. Psychosocial assessment, on the other hand, which is ever more important for the recognition of less visible, but potentially more severe, vulnerabilities (e.g. victims of torture), when conducted, would as a rule take place in up to three times as much (3 months following arrival).

In **Evros**, on the other hand, up to the 20th of December 2017 and not least due to the RIC's small capacity (240 places accommodating slightly more than 300 applicants at

the time), vulnerability screening had been more consistently conducted. The Hellenic Red Cross, which had undertaken medical activities from Praksis in June 2017 and for a transitional period until the state could undertake medical provisions there, as well, had assessed a total of 4,944 cases. Of these, 68 had been assessed as medically vulnerable and 230 referred for further assessment at a public hospital. Some 30 cases, furthermore, were referred for psychosocial assessment and/or psychiatric evaluation at the Mental Health Hospital of Orestiada (Κέντρο Ψυχικής Υγείας Ορεστιάδας) and the Psychiatric Department for Children at Alexandroupoli (Παιδοψυχιατρικό Τμήμα Υγείας Αλεξανδρούπολης), while primary healthcare and sessions with a psychologist were available within the RIC.⁹²

As of the 21st of December 2017, however, HRC's contract in the RIC ended, and the facility was left without stable medical presence. As we were informed by the RIS,⁹³ the gap, up to the point at which KEELPNO personnel could be deployed to **Evros**, was to be covered on a voluntary basis by a local doctor. Regarding the timeframe when the RIC would once more have permanent and adequate medical professionals, however, we were provided with no answer. The sole quasi-answer we were able to obtain came from the police officers at the neighboring Pre-Removal Center at Fylakio, **Evros**, based on whose estimates such a deployment could occur (for both facilities) around February 2018. Five months on (May 2018), such personnel have yet to be deployed

Lastly, it needs to be stressed that an ongoing deficiency of the Greek system of reception is the complete absence of RIC-based psychiatrists, which coupled with the ongoing deficiencies characteristic of island-based public hospitals, equates to some asylum seekers' needs (especially) in medication not being covered, as there is no suitable professional to prescribe them.

⁷⁰ L.4375/2016, articles 8(2a) and 9.

⁷¹ Greek Council for Refugees, op.cit., p.24.

⁷² Indicatively, see Amnesty International, *Trapped In Greece: An Avoidable Refugee Crisis* [website], 18 April 2016, pp.25-29, <<https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/EUR2537782016ENG-LISH.PDF>>, last accessed 29 March 2018.

⁷³ On an exceptional basis and when requested by the authorities (RIS, Hellenic Police at the Pre-Removal Center), UNHCR protection staff are also stand-by to cover any urgent need in information provision. Information acquired through interview with UNHCR staff at Kos Field Office on 11 January 2018.

⁷⁴ Interview with HIAS in Lesbos, on 14 December 2017.

⁷⁵ Former GCR lawyer in Evros.

⁷⁶ Representative of Caritas Hellas, in Lesbos. Interview conducted on 13 December 2017.

⁷⁷ Representative of Arsis, in Kos. Interview held on 11 January 2018.

⁷⁸ Interview with Director of 2nd Police Directorate of Dodekanisa, in Kos, on 12 January 2018.

⁷⁹ For instance, as we were informed in **Lesvos**, there was a common belief that if an asylum seeker had family members in another Member State (MS) then they would be swiftly allowed to move to said MS. This was especially the case with Arab nationals, for whom the tendency was to consider that following a short stay on the islands, they would similarly be able to continue their journeys further into Europe (especially Germany). Interview with Caritas Hellas in Lesbos, on 13 December 2017.

⁸⁰ Interview with RIC Director at Pyli, Kos, on 10 January 2017.

⁸¹ Interview with representatives of Arsis, in Kos, on 11 January 2018.

⁸² European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), 'FRA Opinion on fundamental rights in the 'hotspots' set up in Greece and Italy', FRA [website], 29 November 2016, pp.41-42, <<http://fra.europa.eu/en/opinion/2016/fra-opinion-hotspots-approach>>, last accessed 29 March 2018.

⁸³ Ibid., p.41.

⁸⁴ Interview with RIC Director at Pyli, Kos, on 10 January 2017.

⁸⁵ "The Greek Asylum Service considers that vulnerable groups should be exempted from the border procedure, so as to ensure sufficient special procedural guarantees (e.g. **objective inadequacy of medical and psychiatric services**) for the vulnerable groups". Meaning, lack of adequate support to vulnerable asylum seekers on the Greek islands. European Commission, *ANNEX to the Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council and The Council: Seventh report on the progress made in the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement* [website], 6 September 2017, <https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20170906_seventh_report_on_the_progress_in_the_implementation_of_the_eu-tur-key_statement_annex_1_en.pdf> last accessed 29 March 2018.

⁸⁶ Also, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), 'Δραματική επιδείνωση των συνθηκών για τους αιτούντες άσυλο στη Λέσβο' [Dramatic deterioration of conditions for asylum seekers in Lesbos], MSF [website], 13 July 2017, <https://msf.gr/sites/default/files/msfpublications//msf_report_vulnerable_lesvos_el.pdf>, last accessed 29 March 2018.

⁸⁷ Some asylum seekers, to be noted, would be referred to assessment following their own request. This, however, was and remains a highly problematic "safety valve," ever subject to ongoing gaps in effective information, as well as to the pre-existing expectations and fears with which asylum seekers arrive in Europe. In Lesbos, for instance, we were informed of the case of a Syrian family, whose thirteen year old daughter had an acute psychiatric condition. They had arrived in Greece at an unspecified time prior to the closure of the relocation scheme (the scheme ended in S... 2017), for which they wished to apply in order to go to Germany. The daughter, however, was not properly assessed as vulnerable, thus creating the risk of their being returned (i.e. "readmission") to Turkey. Inter alia, this was because her father was afraid that her condition would lead to their exclusion from the relocation scheme, and was consequently hesitant to declare his daughter's condition. Interview with Caritas Hellas in Lesbos, on 12 December 2017. On the deficiencies of vulnerability screening also see Greek Council for Refugees, op.cit., pp.68-70, and European Council on Refugees and Exiles, 'Greece: Strengthening NGO involvement and capacities around EU 'hotspots' developments: Update on the implementation of the hotspots in Greece and Italy', *asylum information database (aida)* [website], April 2017, pp.2-3, <http://www.asylumineurope.org/sites/default/files/update_report_gcr.pdf>, last accessed 29 March 2018.

⁸⁸ For instance, Healthview, 'Κενά στην υγειονομική φροντίδα των προσφύγων λόγω μη ανανέωσης των συμβάσεων με τις ΜΚΟ' [Gaps in health care for refugees due to non-renewal of NGO contracts], *healthview* [website], 2 June 2017, <<http://www.healthview.gr/34013/kena-stin-ygionomiki-frontida-ton-prosfygon-logo-mi-ananeosis-ton-symvaseon-mko/>>, last accessed 30 March 2018, and Joint NGO letter, *Lack of handover plans for the response in Greece puts asylum seekers at risk, NGOs warn* [press release], 11 July 2017, <<http://reliefweb.int/report/greece/lack-handover-plans-response-greece-puts-asylum-seekers-risk-ngos-warn>>, last accessed 30 March 2018.

⁸⁹ Refugee Support Aegean (RSA), 'Σημαντικά κενά στην περίθαλψη προσφύγων στα Hot Spot, καταρρέει το σύστημα εκτίμησης της ευαλωτότητας' [Significant gaps in refugee care at the Hot Spots, the vulnerability assessment system is collapsing], RSA [website], 7 July 2017, <<https://bit.ly/2JizBEV>>, last accessed 30 March 2018.

⁹⁰ Interview with staff of the Kos RAO, on 12 January 2018.

⁹¹ As per the KEELPNO personnel we interviewed on the 12th of January 2018, approximately 90% of the persons they had seen since their deployment, in late August, already had some medical issue prior to their arrival in Greece, with many suffering from psychological (post-traumatic stress disorders) and/or neurologic conditions (e.g. epilepsies).

⁹² Information acquired through interview with staff of the Hellenic Red Cross at Fylakio, Evros, on 20 December 2017.

⁹³ Interview with Director of RIC at Fylakio, Evros, on 21 December 2017.

Conditions at the RICs

The Reception Directive states clearly that “*Member States shall ensure that material reception conditions provide an adequate standard of living for applicants, which guarantees their subsistence and protects their physical and mental health*”.⁹⁴ Despite this, throughout their RIC-based confinement, refugees and asylum seekers are exposed to various degrees of –usually– substandard conditions, which negatively impact on both aspects of their health.

RIC of Moria: Inhumanity at its lowest

On the 11th and 15th of December 2017 we visited the RIC at Moria, **Lesvos**. The first image we saw was that of a child, exiting his family’s tent, which was found directly next to the overflowing garbage bins. This was just one of many families forced to live under inhumane and degrading conditions in a RIC that has on many occasions been characterized as a “concentration camp”.⁹⁵

Much like in the winter of 2016, so too in 2017 and especially since October, the renewed surge in arrivals, coupled with the ongoing policy of containment, had made it virtually impossible to accommodate the more than 5,000 (at the time of our visit) of the RIC’s inhabitants (the RIC’s capacity the still lied at 2330 palces)⁹⁶ in even the most rudimentary type of decent accommodation. As a result, the RIC had been over-flooded by small tents (some on the road), usually shared by more than one inhabitant and/or family, and even those lucky enough to be placed in so-called “pre-fabricated accommodation” (i.e. containers), were crammed by the 20s (20-25 persons/container). Simply put, the atmosphere was suffocating, with no place to breathe or secure even a minute’s privacy.

Overcrowding, furthermore, had led to some 500 asylum seekers being exceptionally accommodated outside the RIC’s premises, in an area originally reserved for the creation of recreational spaces (“olive grove”). Accommodation there was offered only in tents, and despite many of the “grove’s” inhabitants consisting of families with children, the area was largely left unsupervised.

Things were further aggravated by the RIC’s ever present smell of garbage and sewage waste. Despite efforts –hourly, as we were informed by the cleaning personnel– to maintain even the most rudimentary type of cleanliness to the place, the level of overcrowding constituted this a virtual impossibility. The RIC’s garbage bins where constantly overflowing, as was its sewage system which was on average clogging 20 times per week.

“the infrastructure cannot take it...it is not so much an issue of electricity, as much as the rest...storage spaces, spaces for the personnel and for the accommodation of beneficiaries...”⁹⁷

Water –ever cold and non-drinkable– was only available for a couple of hours per day.⁹⁸ As a result, beneficiaries were provided with daily rations of bottled water, as a means to counterbalance this gap. Each, however, was only entitled to a 1.5 liters bottle, which was evidently inadequate to cover their needs, let alone the needs of more vulnerable asylum seekers, whose conditions (e.g. diabetes) necessitate a constant source of hydration.

Food was provided. Food ratios, however, were inadequate to cover beneficiaries' basic needs, as despite the surge in arrivals since the summer of 2017, food quantities had reportedly remained the same, thus not reflecting increased needs.⁹⁹

In terms of materials scarcity, the same was the case with winter clothing, with many beneficiaries wearing worn-out jackets and shoes (if they had any), and at times summer sandals, despite it being winter. Other crucial gaps we were informed of, regarded powder milk for newborns and babies, as well as sanitary napkins for women. While, lastly, and amongst many others, a final and highly concerning gap concerned the facility's supervision.

The RIC is in principle divided into an external and an internal section.¹⁰⁰ The first, which was accessible through the RIC's main gates, was the designated accommodation section for the vast majority of beneficiaries, which, however, due to over-congestion also housed (in tents and containers) a significant number of families with children, which were running all around. Despite this, however, no security checks were actually conducted at either of the RIC's main gates, and anyone could freely enter and exit without officials taking notice of their presence.¹⁰¹

The situation was slightly better in the RIC's internal section, where personnel offices, an area for the initial detention of newcomers, and 3 different wings for the accommodation of the most vulnerable (families, single women, UAM) were found. Notwithstanding the fact that said wings had security checks during the day, however, there have been frequent reports on the unavailability of adequate night patrols and dimly lit areas,¹⁰² with some reporting a lack of security personnel after 16:00-17:00 at the UAM and single women sections.¹⁰³ If true, this meant that said sections, which were open from 12:00-00:00, were largely left unguarded even during their open time.

Within this context, the ever degrading living conditions of Moria, coupled with peoples' de facto restriction within and around its premises, have consistently created a state of insecurity, adversely affecting the most vulnerable.

"There is an environment of tension in Moria...there are people who cannot sleep for even one night...they live in a constant insecurity...day-by-day they become sicker...physically, mentally..."¹⁰⁴

Drug selling, riots, interethnic, and interpersonal fights have become commonplace, with one such fight occurring in broad daylight, during our second visit (15th of December 2017). The fight was amongst two women, one of which, a pregnant minor whom, as per the employees that sped to resolve the fight, had some unknown suitor within the RIC. Whether, in her case, the pregnancy was the result of willing consent, was something we could not verify. This, however, further highlights the constant SGBV risk to which women are exposed within the RIC, not least due to the de facto unavailability

of gender-based toilets and showers. Coupled with the aforementioned lack of the facility's adequate supervision, women were (and are) at an ever present risk of falling victims of SGBV, with such incidents reportedly being on the rise.¹⁰⁵

Documented cases of SGBV

In 2017, GCR undertook the case of two women who had fallen victims of such violence, while accommodated at the Moria RIC, in Lesvos. Both were in their early twenties, and previously residing in Moria for an unspecified amount of time. They had fallen victims of group rape, as inter alia attested by the medical documents they had been provided with, following their examination by a doctor. Their physical well-being had suffered unrecoverable damage, with their mental state being in such a devastated and traumatized condition, that it had become highly difficult for them to remain in the same space alongside persons of the opposite gender.

RIC of Kos: improved but still inadequate

Between the 10th and 12th of January 2018 we visited the RIC of **Kos**, at Pyli.

The first thing noted was that, comparatively to the rest of the islands, the situation in Kos was distinctly more manageable, with the RIC, whose capacity stands at 772 places, accommodating some 670 residents on those days.¹⁰⁶ Amongst, them, 24 were unaccompanied minors and the rest primarily Syrian and Iraqi families.¹⁰⁷ Accordingly, overpopulation was not a problem, with asylum seekers being accommodated in pre-fabricated housing units (containers), instead of tents.

In itself, this marked a clear improvement, when compared to the prevalent situation up to the summer of 2017. Namely, the RIC of Kos, was the last one to start its operations on the Greek islands in June 2016 –not least due to consistent local protests, on the basis that its creation would ruin tourism.¹⁰⁸ As a result and up to that point, newcomers would at first be mainly “accommodated” in police detention cells and/or UNHCR apartments. Following the RIC’s operationalization in June, furthermore, and though asylum seekers started gradually being transferred to the RIC, some, as already mentioned, remained in detention, while a large number of others were, due to the RIC’s inadequate capacity, forced to remain under unacceptable conditions, outside its premises.

Indicatively, between September 2016 and March 2017, and due to the RIC’ inability to house the totality of asylum seekers found on the island,¹⁰⁹ some hundreds (200-300, and at times even more) were left outside the RIC, in the so-called “Annex;” a makeshift

camp, found bellow the RIC, where today's Pre-Removal Center stands.¹¹⁰ This make-shift camp was characterized by an acute lack in medical provisions, with residents, who were left to survive '*totally unattended and fully exposed to all kinds of risks*',¹¹¹ not being screened for any potential vulnerabilities, as the RIC would not recognize them as falling under its competence.

The "Annex" was ultimately closed in March 2017, but not least due to these living conditions, tensions were commonplace throughout this period and up to the summer of 2017.¹¹² In December 2016, for instance, some of the Annex's frustrated inhabitants began protesting, with some tensions arising on the 19th (small fires, broken windows etc.).¹¹³ Furthermore, during the first months of the RIC's functioning, only asylum application made by Syrian nationals would be registered (a common issue on the islands, at the time), leading to further exacerbating tensions as, inter alia, asylum seekers of Pakistan at the time constituted roughly 90% of the local population.¹¹⁴

Other issues observed throughout 2016-2017 and at least up to March 2017, concerned matters pertaining to the bad quality of food, constant light and water shortages, and especially poor sanitary conditions, with the RIC's sewage system being regularly overflowed and leading to the creation of small ponds throughout the RIC.¹¹⁵

Security was also a major issue of concern, especially at night. At the time, sections were not properly divided (e.g. minors living in containers with adults), and several SGBV incidents were reported.¹¹⁶ Most worryingly, some cases of sexual harassment were reported with respect to unaccompanied minors, whom despite being accommodated in a separate and allegedly guarded section, were not properly protected.¹¹⁷

From what we could tell during our visit, this was no longer an issue at the RIC. It needs to be pointed, nevertheless, that whether this was the result of successful efforts to accommodate beneficiaries in a safety first manner (e.g. families with families, single women with single women), was not possible to confirm. The very fact that the RIC's inhabitants largely composed of families, as well as the fact that conditions in the RIC were highly pertinent on lower, and thus more manageable, numbers of arrivals, in themselves, facilitated the creation of a safer environment. Both, however, are matters highly pertinent on chance, and there is an ever present risk of deterioration, if the composition and/or number of arrivals change, while asylum seekers are forced to remain on the islands; an aspect which was affirmed throughout October-November 2017, when increased arrivals led to the RIC's surpassing its capacity by some 200 persons (920 at the end of November), with many newcomers being sent for "accommodation" at the Pre-Removal Center instead.

"we live with a constant agony... every moment may bring something new".¹¹⁸

In terms of security, furthermore, regular police presence clearly provided for at least a semblance of security. Nevertheless, much like in Moria, Lesbos, the main gate to the RIC remained scarcely unsupervised, and anyone could freely enter-exit without official's taking notice. Indeed, from what we could tell, the only section where security checks were regularly conducted was the RIC's small, barbed-wire fenced, sub-section, where the GAS's offices were found.

Similarly, and despite improvements, a small pond seemingly created by ongoing infrastructural problems pertinent to the RIC's sewage system, still remained. Overall, as we were informed,¹¹⁹ the RIC's level of cleanliness was an ongoing issue for residents –who frequently complained on the matter– as was the issue of material scarcity and especially with respect to winter clothing and sanitary products, such as pampers. Indeed, material scarcity was perhaps one of the few issues which had seen a deterioration in the RIC, without, nevertheless, this meaning that living conditions, as such, were adequate.

*“Conditions are not the best...you certainly don't want to find yourself in their place...but still, it is better when compared to other islands”.*¹²⁰

RIC at Fylakio, Evros: nothing can beautify detention

We visited the RIC at Fylakio, Evros, between the 20th and 22nd of December 2017. The situation at the RIC was clearly more in tune with the provisions asylum seekers are legally entitled to. The RIC was clean and quite with no observable tensions, no shouts, no tents and no overflowing garbage dumps “decorating” applicants’ temporal residences.

As is by now the case with all such facilities we visited, so too at the RIC at Fylakio, Evros, meals were regularly provided (thrice daily). Importantly, however, applicants’ customs and cultural celebrations were also taken into consideration when designing the “menu” (in principle, the RIC Director would, either voluntarily or following requests from applicants make the relevant request to the company responsible for catering the facility). This interpersonal respect, in turn, was clearly evident in the seemingly cordial relations manifest between the RIS and police personnel –the RIC is overseen by officers on a 24/hour basis– and applicants themselves.

Educational and recreational activities were provided in the RIC, albeit –as is the case with all RICs– these were provided through NGOs (METAdrasi) and volunteer-led initiatives from the surrounding area, with the RIC’s minor inhabitants(/detainees) having no access to official education.

The RIC was overpopulated, but nowhere near the levels observed on the islands. During our visit, its 240-places capacity was exceeded by approximately 60 applicants, with all applicants, nevertheless, being accommodated in autonomously heated containers, each with showers and toilets of its own, and divided alongside the RIC’s four different wings. Thus, overpopulation, in itself, did not represent a significant problem. What did, on the other hand, was the scarcity of proper clothing (mostly shoes).

That being said, at the time of our visit, more than a third of the RIC’s population (112 out of slightly more than 300) was composed of unaccompanied minors (UAM). Despite the freezing, windy weather of those days, some of them (10-12), would remain hanging by the fences encompassing each of the RIC’s “accommodation” wings, so as to ask the RIS employee, who guided us throughout the RIC, for shoes that could fit

them, or jackets that would be better suited for the chilling winter conditions characteristic of Evros. The employee would do his best to facilitate their needs with what he could find in the RIC's warehouse (if available, usually a smaller pair of shoes), never forgetting to ask them about their day and how they felt. A question, to which the minors would unanimously, each on their turn, reply: *"I am not well, Mr. X....how can I be? I am not free."*

And indeed, despite the RIC's unquestionable –at least compared to similar facilities on the islands– provision of some standards, the overgeneralized use of detention in **Evros** ever serves to detrimentally affect the psychology of all its inhabitants, creating new vulnerabilities (e.g. depressions), and re-opening "old wounds" in the process (re-traumatization). Especially in the case of minors, who are the primary victims of this policy, and whom, as we were informed,¹²¹ were by order of the local prosecutor not even allowed to exit the RIC for even a daily excursion at a local museum and/or other site. The result: a gradual yet ongoing loss of their identity, and ultimately the very spark of life. As one METADRASI¹²² employee aptly put it:

*"Most children just tell you they want to go to school...they want to move forward...do something better with their life...why do you keep me here? [they ask]...I haven't done anything bad...[And] you see a disappointment in their face, an anxiety...[ultimately they become] accustomed with the whole situation...an indefinite wait...You see children...fourteen, fifteen, sixteen year olds from Syria being surrounded by futility...a constant agony...[waiting] to leave...[to be] transferred to a hosting facility...go to school...[waiting] to recover that lost childhood they [once] had"*¹²³

⁹⁴ Article 17(2), Directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and Council of 26 June 2013 laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection (recast).

⁹⁵ Indicatively, see H., Smith, H., "Welcome to prison": winter hits in one of Greece's worst refugee camps', *The Guardian*, 22 December 2017, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/22/this-isnt-europe-life-greece-worst-refugee-camps>>, last accessed 30 March 2018, and Chardalia, N., 'Human Rights Watch: Η Μόρια είναι σαν στρατόπεδο συγκέντρωσης' [Human Rights Watch: Moria is like a concentration camp], *SKAI*, 5 October 2017, <<http://www.skai.gr/news/greece/article/356821/human-rights-watch-i-moria-einai-san-stratopedo-sugedrosis/>>, last accessed 30 March 2018.

⁹⁶ As of January 2018, the RIC's capacity has been increased to 3,000 places.

⁹⁷ Moria RIC sub-Director. Brief meeting held on 15 December 2017.

⁹⁸ Interview with HIAS, in Lesvos, on 14 December 2017.

⁹⁹ Interview with representative of Bashira, in Lesvos, on 14 December 2017.

¹⁰⁰ And a third section where the asylum service was found, which was enclosed in tall, barbed-wired fences.

¹⁰¹ Indicatively, during both our visit at the Moria RIC, no one ever asked us who we were, and if not for a personal initiative to declare ourselves at the entry gate, after mistakenly strolling by it and entering the RIC's inhabited section, probably no one would have known up to this day.

¹⁰² Interview with UNHCR representatives in Lesvos, on 15 December 2017.

¹⁰³ Information acquired via Interviews with representative of Bashira (14 December 2017), in Lesvos, and RIS employees at the single women and UAM sections (both 15 December 2017) in Moria, Lesvos.

¹⁰⁴ Representative of PIKPA, Lesvos. Interview held on 13 December 2017.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with representatives of UNHCR in Lesvos on 15 December 2017. Also see UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Refugee women and children face heightened risk of sexual vio-*

lence amid tensions and overcrowding at reception facilities on Greek islands [briefing note], 9 February 2018, <http://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2018/2/5a7d67c4b/refugee-women-children-face-heightened-risk-sexual-violence-amid-tensions.html>, last accessed 30 March 2018.

¹⁰⁶ Specifically, 667 on the 10th, 668 on the 11th, and 664 on the 12th of December 2018, as per the data uploaded by the Hellenic Ministry of Digital Policy, Telecommunications and Information at <http://mindigital.gr/index.php/%CF%80%CF%81%CE%BF%CF%83%CF%86%CF%85%CE%B3%CE%B9%CE%BA%CF%8C-%CE%B6%CE%AE%CF%84%CE%B7%CE%BC%CE%B1-refugee-crisis/1860-apotyposi-tis-ethnikis-eikonas-ka-tastasis-gia-to-prosfygiko-metanasteftiko-zitima-tis-9-1-2018>.

¹⁰⁷ Brief meeting with representative of Frontex, in Kos, held on 10 January 2018.

¹⁰⁸ B., Wesel, 'In Greece, protests against EU refugee hot spot on Kos', *Deutsche Welle*, 15 February 2016, <<http://www.dw.com/en/about-dw/profile/s-30688>>, last accessed 30 March 2018.

¹⁰⁹ As per the local Kos news, for instance, in September 2016 the RIC housed more than 1,500 applicants. Kosnews, '1531 μετανάστες στο HOT SPOT της Κω!!! 72 αφίξεις το πρωί' [1531 migrants at the HOT SPOT in Kos!!! 72 arrivals in the morning], *Kosnews*, 5 September 2016, <<https://www.kosnews24.gr/politika/item/230874-1531-metanastes-sto-hot-spot-tis-ko-72-afikseis-to-proi>>, last accessed 28 March 2018.

¹¹⁰ Interview with member of the local (Kos) solidarity group, Solidarity Kos, held on 12 January 2018.

¹¹¹ Quoted from GCR internal monthly report on the situation in Kos in November 2016.

¹¹² Brief meeting with representative of IOM, in Kos, on 10 January 2018.

¹¹³ GCR internal report on the situation in Kos of January 2017.

¹¹⁴ Interview with staff of the RAO, in Kos, on 12 January 2018.

¹¹⁵ GCR internal report on the situation in Kos of March 2017.

¹¹⁶ Information acquired through interview with UNHCR staff at Kos Field Office, on 11 January 2018.

¹¹⁷ As per observations made by GCR's lawyer at the time (March 2017), adults would frequently enter the UAM section, by jumping over the fence separating the latter's section from the rest of the RIC.

¹¹⁸ Director of RIC at Pyli, Kos. Interview held on 10 January 2018.

¹¹⁹ Interviews with UNHCR staff at Kos Field Office, on January 11, 2018 and representatives of Arsis, in Kos, on 11 January 2018.

¹²⁰ Employee of Kos RAO. Interview held on 12 January 2018.

¹²¹ Interview with Director of RIC at Fylakio, Evros, on 21 December 2017.

¹²² METADRASI is the NGO inter alia responsible for the supervision of unaccompanied minors in the RIC at Fylakio, Evros. Interview conducted on 21 December 2017.

¹²³ METAdrasi staff at the Fylakio RIC, in Evros. Interview held on 21 December 2017.

Effects of Reception

The preceding section closed with one example of the detrimental effects that living (amongst others) conditions have on asylum seekers' –in the specific case, children's– (mental) health. It goes without saying that it is neither the sole, nor the gravest. This final section will provide an overview of some of the direct and indirect effects which the policy of entrapping asylum seekers at the borders has created.

Alone and Unattended

In **Lesvos** and **Kos**, two islands exhibiting quite dissimilar paths in terms of the reception of asylum seekers ("stagnation" and relative improvement, respectively), effects have been highly similar to those of **Evros**, albeit with a distinct touch of added severity. Thus in both islands, when interviewees were asked about the mental state of the

beneficiaries accommodated in the RICs, the usual reply would revolve around words such as “deterioration”, “depression” and “suicide attempts”. This to be noted, is not a new situation.

For nearly two years and with increasing severity following the Statement’s implementation, asylum seekers’ mental and physical health has been continuously deteriorating in direct proportion to their time of stay at the (island) RICs.¹²⁴ A time which, from many, has extended well beyond 6 months, with some having been forced to reside in this originally envisioned “transit zones” for periods extending to 15, 16 and at times even more months (cases of 2 years at the time of publication). A time, furthermore, during which previous vulnerabilities and traumas have been re-opened, and new ones created (e.g. hepatitis, cardiological issues, diabetes); amongst others, due to poor eating habits (food quality in most RICs), the high levels of insecurity characteristic of not knowing what one’s futures might bring, increasing tensions and, not least, increasing instances of SGBV incidents.¹²⁵

*The more they stay here, the more they lose their identity...their roles
[e.g. father, mother, employee, teacher, student, child]¹²⁶*

In this context, suicidal tendencies seem to have critically increased in both (and all) islands,¹²⁷ with some of the more shocking everyday realities of Moria, **Lesvos** (and to a lesser extent **Kos**) revolving around children engaging in acts of self-harm and suicide attempts through the ingestion of pills –a situation which seemingly led to their being prohibited from having unsupervised access to medication,¹²⁸ instead of their immediately being transferred out of the RIC– or single women’s desperate attempts at becoming pregnant, so as to prove their vulnerability in the eyes of their jailors; an act which, in turn, further exposes them to risks (e.g. miscarriages).

In the meantime, gaps in healthcare provisions remain as critical as ever in both islands and the **Evros** land border.¹²⁹ Gaps, that is, which, to an extent and as already mentioned are intrinsic to the RICs’ still understaffed (medical-psychosocial) capacities, but which also manifest in the form of chronic deficiencies characteristic of the system of public health (especially) at the borders.

To give some examples, as per our interviews in **Kos**, at the time of our visit the island’s public hospital still faced severe gaps in medical professions, including a lack of pediatricians, gynecologist, endocrinologists, neurologists, cardiologists, psychologists and psychiatrists.¹³⁰ In **Lesvos**, similarly, up to the time of our visit in December 2017 (and most probably up to this day), only one psychiatrist was available for covering the needs of the entire island (refugees and locals).

In both islands, furthermore, there were insufficient means of transportation to and from the hospital and the RICs,¹³¹ insufficient means of interpretation between beneficiaries and public doctors, and insufficient spaces of hospitalization.

“We’ve had cases of women needing to give birth in the afternoon or on weekends and [no one –including doctors–] knew what to do with them, as there were no interpreters...[similarly] we’ve had cases [of

women] that had to leave [the gynecological clinic] shortly after giving birth, because there weren't enough beds [for everyone] ...that's how huge the needs are''¹³²

On the other hand, even subject to the availability of, at least, the means of transportation, which in light of the aforementioned gaps have been complemented through assistance provided by the army (in **Kos**) or through transfers enacted by the police, this still does not guarantee beneficiaries timely access to healthcare. In **Evros**, where it should be reminded that as of the 21st of December 2017 neither of the facilities examined (RIC and Pre-Removal Center at Fylakio) has permanent doctors, transfers to public hospitals have traditionally been carried out by the police –and to that extent, with positive effects.¹³³ The two closest, to the small village of Fylakio, hospitals, however, are found at approximately 25 (Orestiada) and 40 (Didimoticho) minutes distance. Both, furthermore, are at an ever present risk of inaccessibility, as the poor state of the infrastructure (roads) connecting the Fylakio facilities and the hospitals is ever susceptible to being blockaded, during the winter, due to heavy snowfall. Accordingly, and especially considering the aforementioned lack of doctors in the RIC and Pre-Removal Center, it is perhaps only a matter of time until an “accident” occurs.

In sum, not only have border conditions directly and negatively impacted asylum seekers' wellbeing, but throughout their increasing vulnerabilization they have been forced to remain restricted in regions (borders) and facilities which can scarcely guarantee their support, and ultimately their right to life. All of this, in the name of maintaining geographical restrictions at all costs, over and beyond individual wellbeing.

Sample cases

Case of Pakistani national with severe back problems (spine). He was in severe risk of becoming paralyzed. Despite this, and despite the fact that the local (Lesvos) hospital was in no position to assist him, the lifting of his geographical restrictions was denied.

Case of male of unspecified nationality. He underwent two heart attacks while on the island of Lesvos. Even so his geographical restriction was lifted only following continuous pressure exerted by volunteers and NGOs.

Case of single woman of unspecified nationality. She had severe kidney problems, which led to her crying continuously for 5 days out of pain. On the 5th day she was finally transferred to the hospital, yet she was afterwards returned to the RIC, where no medical follow-up assistance was provided to her.

Case of single man from Syria. He fled the island due to both the fact that he had health issues and that he could not stand staying in the camp anymore. He had medical documents from the island, stating that he was in need of restoration surgery in a specialized tertiary medical center (such center does not exist on the islands). The Asylum Service requested yet another medical document, signed by a public doctor, before agreeing to lift the restriction. It also requested that the document state clearly that his surgery could only take place in Athens and that he needed frequent follow-ups with the same doctor that would perform the surgery.

Case of Syrian couple with a newborn. The man is blind, but they proceeded in examining his request without taking into consideration his vulnerability. The woman and the child were granted refugee status, whereas her husband received a negative decision on the island. He appealed against the decision and the committee issued a second instance decision, stating that his vulnerability had not been taken into consideration and therefore an additional interview was required

Alone and Criminalized

Leaving aside the detrimental effects that reception directly has on asylum seekers' lives, another, scarcely touched upon side-effect pertains to the multiplicity of impediments it places towards their eventual integration. First Reception is not only a filtering tool between the "desired" and the "undesired" of a deterrence policy based highly on statistics of asylum chances tied to persons' nationalities,¹³⁴ but also and primarily a channel towards newcomers' eventual integration into their new host society.¹³⁵ Yet the very conditions under which this first reception takes place at the borders, creates a priori impediments to any such prospects.

For starters, excluding some degree of informal education in the RICs (mainly NGO-led with the support of UNHCR), formal education, which is ever more important for (not least) the potential of socialization it offers between refugee and local children, is virtually non-existent at the borders. In **Evros**, as already mentioned, the status of detainees means that minors (unaccompanied and otherwise) have no access to the world outside of the RIC, and thus to schools and formal education as well. On the **islands**, on the other hand, despite some slight differences,¹³⁶ the situation is very much the same, with children "accommodated" in the RICs similarly having virtually no access to the official system of education.¹³⁷ This, to be noted, is yet another reason for tensions and complaints, with questions such as "*why does my child not go to school?*" seemingly being constantly on the minds of many worried parents.¹³⁸

Similarly, the constant state of transit and uncertainty in which asylum seekers find themselves while forced to remain at the borders, coupled with ongoing deficiencies in terms of long-term, state-led, integration planning, further impede this process. Despite slow improvements on the mainland,¹³⁹ especially on the islands the idea of integration still very much functions under a logic of temporariness, seemingly not yet accustomed to the fact that refugees "are here to stay", as common beliefs seem to still be informed by the idea that, since they (i.e. asylum seekers) do not ultimately wish to remain in Greece, at some point they will leave.¹⁴⁰

*"Integration is very difficult in this context...integration needs a life-long plan and some sort of stability... [even] a temporary [sort of] integration is in need of a plan"*¹⁴¹

Most importantly, however, reception, as currently implemented through an array of detention and restriction means, is the foremost barrier to integration. The very fact that most asylum seekers are "received" by means of detention and/or restriction of their liberty within the RICs and/or surrounding areas, a priori serves to create barriers between a community of "Them" (refugees and asylum seekers) and "Us" (the locals), whereby the aim –willingly or not– becomes keeping the two communities segregated at all costs, usually (on the islands) in the name of "protecting tourism".¹⁴²

Indeed, it is not by chance that within these past two years' increasingly state-led response to the management of arrivals (through RICs/"hotspots" and Pre-Removal Centers), a similar decrease in the participation of volunteer groups and/or activists from local societies has been the case at the borders.¹⁴³ This has primarily been the result of

the increased difficulty of gaining access to the population of asylum seekers, stemming from the latter's residing in mostly closed, detention-type accommodation facilities (especially, Pre-Removal Centers).¹⁴⁴

Similarly, islanders' fatigue on the matter should not be underestimated. Notwithstanding some small, ephemeral, improvements,¹⁴⁵ the situation at the borders has largely remained the same for the past two years and, simply put, persons who might have previously been wholeheartedly engaged in the mass solidarity movement of 2015, have become tired with what has become an established and unchanging situation of mistreatment of asylum seekers, with no essential signs of changing in site.

*"I see people who are very friendly towards [refugees] changing because they cannot take it anymore...they cannot handle [the situation]."*¹⁴⁶

Most worryingly, and in this context, the very foundations for changing attitudes towards refugees and asylum seekers, ever reinforced by inter alia the changing media and political discourse following the Statement's implementation (terms such as "migrants" gradually replacing those of "refugees", with the usual negative effects that such replacement has in terms of considerations of persons' legitimate right to arrive in Europe),¹⁴⁷ result in a cocktail of rising xenophobia and enmity. Or in any case, perhaps not so much rising xenophobia, as much as an increasing opening of the space for such sentiments and acts to manifest themselves in the public sphere.

*"You have a society in a state of fatigue...at least in terms of solidarity... [thereby] it is easy for this fatigue to become something else... [it is in this context that various] others start penetrating [the public sphere]."*¹⁴⁸

This becomes especially the case in light of the tensions, riots, and sporadic acts of delinquency (e.g. stealing) exhibited by small proportions of the RICs' population, whom though largely attributable to their ongoing state of confinement, still increasingly become the primary means through which locals at the borders and Greece, more broadly, become aware of asylum seekers' presence. Put simply, when the primary means for getting to know this "Other" diminish from daily interactions to frequent news on tensions, riots and more broadly violence –even in islands where such tensions have been relatively few, such as **Kos**, they still constitute sporadic emanations of persons' frustrations¹⁴⁹– then seeing said "Other" as a danger, becomes an ever-present, even if not actually representative of the population of asylum seekers, risk.

*"The problem is that through this [situation], the far-right presents itself as vindicated ... i.e. "we told you so"...and as long as people [on the island] are pressured, on the one hand they gradually lose the arguments to counter them [i.e. far right groups], and on the other, some become [convinced by them]."*¹⁵⁰

Escape as the last solution

In this context inter alia consisting of asylum seekers' ever deteriorating mental health, effective exclusion from a set of basic services (e.g. healthcare), lack of information, detention and restriction of liberty within ever inadequate or inhumane conditions, while increasingly estranged from the local society, it is not to wonder why an increasing number of asylum seekers¹⁵¹ –especially from the islands– choose to once more expose themselves to smugglers. It is similarly no wonder why, throughout the past two years the “smuggling business” has largely started flourishing in Greece as well,¹⁵² as desperate asylum seekers strive to flee the islands.

Cases of applicants being absolved-justified for having transgressed their imposed restriction of freedom to the islands

- 1) Decision 94/2018 of the Administrative Court of Piraeus of the 16th of February 2018. The case, which was handled by GCR, regarded a Syrian previously residing at the Lesvos “hotspot”, who had violated his geographical restriction. The Court inter alia accepted that his decision to transgress the restriction was justifiable on the basis of the *“threat towards his physical integrity due to prevailing conditions during his stay at the camp”*, and subsequently the beneficiary was released.
- 2) Decision 2617/2017 of the sole-judge District Court of Thessaloniki («Αυτόφωρο Μονομελές Πλημμελειοδικείο Θεσσαλονίκης») of the 6th of February 2017. The case regarded two nationals of Pakistan, who were geographically restricted at the Leros hotspot. Both, and despite their having similarly transgressed their geographical restriction on the island of Leros, were absolved and judged innocent because it was deemed that this transgression was *“significantly less severe [both] by type and importance than the threatened damage [towards] their personal health and integrity”*, as a result of conditions at the RIC.

And indeed, based on GCR's experience, most frequent cases of bypassing the imposed geographical restriction pertain to medical issues (e.g. physical and mental health issues), the poor quality of living conditions at the RICs (e.g. lack of heating, bed bugs, lack of doctors), verbal, physical and sexual victimization, and lack of information (literally, in some cases they hadn't been informed that they could not leave the island and, accordingly, just “followed the crowd” and ended up in Athens).

¹²⁴ Interview with representative of PIKPA, in Lesvos, on 13 December 2017. To be noted, even a year following the Statement's implementation, in March 2017, the rise in suicidal tendencies, post-traumatic stress disorders and severe psychological-psychiatric conditions, all of which directly connected to asylum seekers' living conditions in the RICs and their constant state of fear and uncertainty for the future, had already been documented, inter alia, by the NGO Medecins du Monde (MSF). Zotou, E., 'Κατάθλιψη, έντονες αυτοκτονικές τάσεις και μη καταγεγραμμένα θύματα βασανιστηρίων' [Depression, intense suicidal tendencies and non-registered victims of torture], *I Avgi*, 18 March 2017, <<http://www.avgi.gr/article/10811/7989422/1-katathlipse-entones-autoktonikes-taseis-kai-me-kat-agegrammena-thymata-basanisterion>>, last accessed 29 March 2018.

¹²⁵ Also see UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Aegean Islands Fact Sheet*, UNHCR [website], 31 January 2018, <<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/62215>>, last accessed 29 March 2018.

¹²⁶ Caritas Hellas employee, in Lesvos. Interview held on 13 December 2017.

¹²⁷ Indicatively, in December 2017, an alleged 9 year old, living in the RIC of Vial, in **Chios**, tried to hang himself with his shirt. Georgoulis, N., 'Αποπειράθηκε να κρεμαστεί με το μανίκι του ανήλικος Σύριος στη ΒΙΑΛ' [Minor Syrian attempted to hang himself by his sleeve in Vial], *politis chios*, 2 December 2017, <<http://www.politischios.gr/horia/apopeirathike-na-kremastei-me-maniki-toy-anilikos-syrios-sti-bial>>, last accessed 29 March 2018.

¹²⁸ Interview with RIS employees at the UAM section in Moria, Lesvos, on 15 December 2017.

¹²⁹ Also see Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), 'Confronting the mental health emergency on Samos and Lesvos: Why the containment of asylum seekers on the Greek islands must end', *MSF* [website], October 2017, <http://www.msf.org/sites/msf.org/files/2017_10_mental_health_greece_report_final_low.pdf>, last accessed 30 March 2018.

¹³⁰ Interviews with staff of Arsis and KEELPNO in Kos, on 11 and 12 January 2018, respectively.

¹³¹ As of the time of our respective visits (January 2018 and December 2017) in both **Kos** and **Lesvos** there was only one ambulance and/or transportation means available for the transfer of beneficiaries from the RICs and to the respective, island, public hospitals. Information acquired via Interviews with RIS employees at the single women section in Moria, Lesvos (15 December 2017), and with the RIC Director at Pyli, Kos (10 January 2018).

¹³² Representative of PIKPA in Lesvos. Interview held on 13 December 2017.

¹³³ As we were informed by the Hellenic Red Cross (HRC) in **Evros** on the 20th of December 2017 –a day before its leaving the RIC– throughout the duration of their deployment in the RIC (June 2017–20 December 2017), some 3-4 cases of cancer patient, which were in need of immediate treatment had been transferred and subjected to surgery at the hospitals within 10 days, after which their chemotherapy had begun. Information acquired through interview with the Hellenic Red Cross at the RIC at Fylakio, Evros, on 20 December 2017.

¹³⁴ Indeed, throughout all the regions visited, officials would make clear distinctions between refugees and economic migrants, largely based on their being citizens of so-called "high" and "low recognitions rate nationalities". These, in turn, to an extent (albeit not always, as at times even Afghan citizens who have a refugee status recognition rate of 68.3% in Greece, would be perceived as to-be-expulsed "economic migrants") relied on the Greek Asylum Service's statistics on "rates" of refugee recognition per nationality. These "rates" (available in English), can be found at <http://asylo.gov.gr/en/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Greek-Asylum-Service-Statistical-Data-EN.pdf>. Nevertheless, it needs to be pointed that, despite their offering an overview of the evolution of applications for international protection, in themselves, are not and cannot provide a solid basis for a priori, as was the case during our research, considering some nationals as non-beneficiaries of international protection, as such perceptions would inter alia also contravene article 3 of the Geneva Convention, with respect to the non-discrimination of international protection applicants on the basis of "race, religion or country of origin". UN General Assembly, *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, 28 July 1951, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 189, p. 137, <<http://www.refworld.org/docid/3be01b964.html>>, last accessed 26 March 2018.

¹³⁵ Lodovici, M., S., et. al., 'Integration of refugees in Greece, Hungary and Italy: Comparative Analysis', *European Parliament* [website], 20 December 2017, p.86, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=IPOL_STU%282017%29614194>, last accessed 28 March 2018.

¹³⁶ On the islands, some vulnerable asylum seekers have benefited from the possibility of residing in UNHCR apartments, the management of which is outsourced to local NGOs, subject, however, to UNHCR's capacity to create such places of accommodation. This, to be noted, is amongst some of the scarce, best-practices observed at the island borders, however since it constitutes a (temporary) measure of assistance, and not one that reflects the state's engagement in the management of arrivals, it has not been discussed throughout the current research. Nevertheless, it needs to be pointed that some few of the children residing in such apartments do have access to schools in both **Kos** and **Lesvos**.

¹³⁷ Information acquired through interview with Caritas Hellas, in Lesvos (13 December 2017) and representatives of Arsis, in Kos (11 January 2018). Education gaps on the islands had similarly been observed by the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) following its May 2017 visit to Greece. European Parliament: Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, op.cit., pp.7-8.

¹³⁸ Interview with Caritas Hellas, in Lesvos, on 13 December 2017.

¹³⁹ Indicatively, in February 2018 a pilot project was announced, aimed at placing the foundation for refugees' full-scale integration in two Greek, mainland, Municipalities (Livadia and Thiva). This, however, will only run for 6 months, with an additional 6-month potential of renewal. Hellenic Republic: Ministry of Migration Policy, 'Παρουσίαση προγράμματος HELIOS για την κοινωνική ένταξη προσφύγων και μεταναστών: Επίσημη παρουσίαση από τον Υπουργό Μεταναστευτικής Πολιτικής Γιάννη Μουζάλα, τον Διεθνή Οργανισμό Μετανάστευσης (ΔΟΜ) και τους Δήμους Λεβαδέων και Θηβαίων' [Presentation of the HELIOS programme for the social inclusion of refugees and migrants: official presentation by the Minister of Migration Policy Giannis Mouzalas, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Municipalities of Livadia and Thebes], *Government of the Hellenic Republic* [website], 14 February 2018, <<https://government.gov.gr/parousiasi-programmatos-helios-gia-tin-kinoniki-entaxi-prosfigon-ke-metanaston/>>, last accessed 30 March 2018.

¹⁴⁰ Also see D., Howden, 'Greece: Between Deterrence and Integration', *News Deeply*, May 2017, available at: <<http://issues.newsdeeply.com/greece-between-deterrence-and-integration>>, last accessed 30 March 2018.

¹⁴¹ Representative of PIKPA, Lesvos. Interview held on 13 December 2017.

¹⁴² Also attested during our interview with the Director of 2nd Police Directorate of Dodekanisa, in **Kos**, whereby emphasis was placed on the successes in terms of managing to restrict asylum seekers' presence near the RIC and its small, neighboring, village of Pyli. Information acquired through interview with police representative at the Pyli (Kos) Pre-Removal Center on January 10, 2018.

¹⁴³ Interview with representative of Bashira, in Lesvos, on 14 December 2017.

¹⁴⁴ Interview with member of the local solidarity group, Solidarity Kos, on 12 January 2018.

¹⁴⁵ For instance, the increase of the Moria RIC's capacity in **Lesvos**, from 2,330 to 3,000 places by 18 January 2018 via the placement of additional containers (replacing tents), or the transfer of some 6,000 asylum seekers to the mainland between October and December 2017, which as reported by UNHCR did not significantly change the situation. See the relevant data for 17 January 2018 on the Ministry Digital Policy, Telecommunications and Information, available at <https://bit.ly/2Ez6MoA>, and UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Situation on Greek islands still grim despite speeded transfers* [briefing note], 22 December 2017, <<http://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2017/12/5a3ccd394/situation-greek-islands-still-grim-despite-speeded-transfers.html>>, last accessed 30 March 2018, respectively.

¹⁴⁶ Representative of PIKPA, Lesvos. Interview held on 13 December 2017.

¹⁴⁷ M., S., Lodovici et. al., op.cit, p. 80.

¹⁴⁸ Member of the Lesvos Municipality. Interview held on 12 December 2017.

¹⁴⁹ Vimatisko, 'Συμβαίνει Τώρα: Φωτιά στο Hot Spot στο Πυλί' [Happening Now: Fire at the Hot Spot at Pyli], *Vimatisko*, 13 December 2017, <<http://www.vimatisko.gr/?page=news&records=details&p.id=51293>>, last accessed 30 March 2018.

¹⁵⁰ Member of the Lesvos Municipality. Interview held on 12 December 2017.

¹⁵¹ Reportedly 5,000 to 6,000 by May 2017. European Parliament: Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, *Mission Report following the LIBE Mission to Greece hotspots and Athens*, 22 – 25 May 2017, op.cit., p.14. In **Kos**, alone, since the RIC's operationalisation in June 2016, and up to the time of our visit in January 2018, some 400 asylum seekers of Pakistani origin, alone, had fled the island, based on the asylum cases archived by the RAO. Information acquired via interview with representatives of the Kos RAO, on 12 January 2018.

¹⁵² Indicatively, from 751 in the first ten months of 2016, in 2017 (Greek) police apprehensions on charges of people smuggling had significantly increased, reaching 1,156. Data available at the Hellenic Police website at http://www.astynomia.gr/images/stories//2017/statistics17/allodapwn/10_statistics_all_2017_dia.png.

The case of Patra: the re-emergence of an exit-point to Europe

Between the 29th and 30th of November 2017, we visited the city-port of **Patra**.¹⁵³ Patra, as already mentioned in the project's introduction, is not a border entry point for mixed migration flows. Thus with the exception of a Praxis-run shelter for unaccompanied minors, it has neither a RIC nor any other type of hospitality center, as the city is not officially designated as a hosting place for newcomers. Patra is, on the other hand, a transit zone, with its close proximity to Italy (via sea routes) having for years constituted it an "irregular exit" (from Greece to Italy and then central/northern Europe) for refugees, asylum seekers and vulnerable migrants, alike; a trend which was brought to a halt during 2015 and the first months of 2016, when the small village of Idomeni near Greece's northern borders served as a gathering point for those wishing to venture further into Europe.¹⁵⁴

That being said, as a direct effect of the closure of the "Balkan Route" and the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement, Patra has been once more experiencing a steady increase in (secondary movement) arrivals throughout the past year. Arrivals, specifically, of post-March 2016 newcomers who, largely being/becoming disillusioned with their prospects in Greece (e.g. long periods of confinement and a still struggling Greek economy), have been reaching Patra with the aim of (irregularly) boarding on one of the ferries leaving from the city's port to Italy.

Once in Patra, they gather at two of the city's derelict factories (Avex and Ladopoulos) –found across the city's port (literally, across the road)– which, in lack of alternative housing sites, serve as their temporary accommodation. Living conditions at the factories are inhumane and hazardous, with the crumbling walls and shattered windows, amassing piles of garbage and lack of toilets, leaving the factories' inhabitants –many of who are forced to sleep on the ground– without protection from the weather and exposed to a series of hygiene risks.¹⁵⁵

*"you have to be hardened to be able to survive there...in the summer [for instance] the heat was insufferable...[yet] they were just standing there; without food, without bathrooms, without water...and with garbage [all over the place]...that's why [you won't see] any elderly persons [living there]...an elderly person wouldn't be able to [survive] there."*¹⁵⁶

At the time of our visit (November 29-30, 2017), more than 400 third-country nationals/stateless persons were living in these conditions, with many having fled the islands, and some having arrived via the Evros land border. As we were informed,¹⁵⁷ most had asylum seekers' cards,¹⁵⁸ with the vast majority being nationals of Pakistan (approximately 60%), Afghanistan, and to a lesser extent Iraq, Iran, Morocco and Algeria. Amongst them, some 60 were unaccompanied minors of 8 to 18 years of age, with average ages for the factories' exclusively single men inhabitants ranging between 17

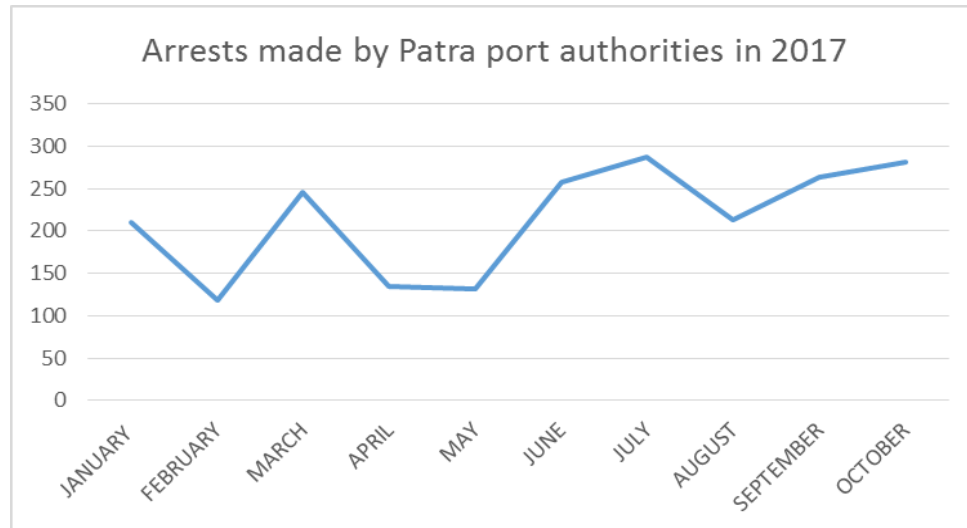
and 25 years.¹⁵⁹ All were suffering from at least a symptom of cold, many from additional medical conditions (e.g. scabies or heart conditions),¹⁶⁰ and some from injuries acquired during or following their attempts at entering the port.¹⁶¹ Despite this, however, they still persisted in their endeavor, seemingly determined to either succeed or succumb while trying to undertake a journey that would, in the end, only further expose their lives to risks.¹⁶²

The process, specifically, which begins in the morning (around 10:00-10:30am), as soon as the first ferries bound for Italy reach the city's port, is highly straightforward and involves two stages. During the first, would-be stowaways –either alone, in groups or with the “help” of smugglers– try to pinpoint and hide in any of the Italy-bound vehicles (usually lorries) parked in the port's main area, before the latter can undergo pre-embarkation security checks and enter the ferries. This entails jumping over the ports short, external fence and rushing towards the vehicles of choice, while avoiding being detected by both police and port security personnel, as well as the vehicles' drivers who, faced with severe penal repercussions if found knowingly hiding someone in their cargo, have been known to employ force, in order to avert them.¹⁶³ Following this, those that manage to make it through this “game of cat and mouse”, –as this daily occurrence has been aptly termed¹⁶⁴– then have to remain undetected while their selected means of transportation goes through the port's second, and much more heavily guarded, fence, during which vehicles are thoroughly scanned for “irregular” passengers. The few “lucky” ones that manage to make it through this second stage, as well, can then commence their journey towards Italy and, perhaps, beyond.

At its core, however, this is a highly dangerous and hopeless process, which, as mentioned, only serves to further expose already vulnerable persons to a range of additional, life-threatening risks. First is the constant risk of getting trampled or severely injured by the heavy machinery (including trucks and lorries) roaming through the port, as the rush to find and reach that “ideal hiding place”, while simultaneously trying to avoid detection, by necessity diverts attention from the broader surrounding environment. Second is the threat presented by the hiding spot itself, which including such diverse spaces as unventilated truck containers, engine compartments and spots near to the vehicle' (at times, spinning) wheels, is but a tragedy in the making. Lastly, even upon successful embarkation on a ship, third-country nationals/stateless persons still have to remain undetected up to the point of their eventual debarkation, or face the prospect of their swift return to Greece; in which case the whole endeavor –which they undertake with nothing but a bottle of sugared water to help them make it through– proves to have been for naught.¹⁶⁵

Indeed, on more than a few occasions the “lucky ones” have managed to arrive in Italy only to be faced with another wall, another barrier, and ultimately be returned to the place they so desperately tried to flee. Albeit, exposing the full stakes at play in this tragedy, this return has at times taken the form of their lifeless body –having succumbed during the arduous journey– being sent back to Greece. Such was the case of an unaccompanied minor –one of several– whom having to remain for two days hidden in a truck's still functioning fridge (in sub-zero temperatures), was returned to Greece for identification.¹⁶⁶

It is for this reason that the case of Patra provides a flagrant reminder of the side-effects that deterrence, either at the EU or local levels, has had and continues to have on vulnerable persons' lives. Yet, in spite of this, deterrence and repression remain the sole facets of the Greek state and Europe, with which those reaching Patra are once more faced.



Source: Patra port authorities¹⁶⁷

It is indicative that as arrivals in Patra started increasing, so did the measures to prevent them from exiting the country; something inter alia reflected in the increased number of arrests, which in January 2018 alone reached the 350 mark,¹⁶⁸ and the increasing emphasis placed on guarding the port, as highlighted through such measures as the deployment of additional security personnel and the gradual construction of yet another, high-security, fence.¹⁶⁹ Yet this increased efficiency in guarding the port, in pinning down the hopeless –whom much like Fanon’s “wretched of the earth” have been transformed into second-class humans in a system that has largely treated them as such¹⁷⁰– and obstructing them from further venturing into “the land of promise”, is nowhere to be found when it comes to assisting them in their time of need.

Thus even upon their arrest, the majority of would-be stowaways have simply been left once more on their own; left to return to their squalid “accommodation”, where if not for the assistance provided by civil society groups and organizations, and to a lesser extent the local Municipality, perhaps a worse fate would have expected them.

*“We have made calls to the state [to intervene and assist these people]...but the Ministry of Health has replied through the Municipality [that those living in the factories] are “irregular” [migrants]...[therefore] we can’t do anything [for them].”*¹⁷¹

Meanwhile, as if to further exacerbate the situation, allegations on beatings and abuses suffered by third-country nationals and stateless persons in the process of their being deterred from entering the port have been on the rise,¹⁷² with escalating tensions between the former and police and port authorities increasingly monopolizing the local

news.¹⁷³ Tensions, in turn, which as they become noticed by some segments of society at both local and national levels, contribute to the further legitimization of intolerant, racist and xenophobic views, in turn once more devastatingly impacting asylum seekers' prospects of integration.

It is to be noted that at the time of publication (24 May 2018), and perhaps largely as the situation could not have been disregarded any longer –not least following the death of a 17 year old Afghan refugee on the 4th of May¹⁷⁴– on the 15th of May a large operation was conducted at the city's derelict factories. The operation, which had been planned for more than a month with the aim of transferring the people to “*suitable hosting facilities*”, as per the Minister of Migration Policy,¹⁷⁵ was reportedly carried out by no less than 450 police officers and led to the peaceful evacuation of the factories' more than 600 inhabitants, amongst whom many minors (103).¹⁷⁶ On the very same day, GCR was informed of their transfer at the Pre-Removal detention Center of Korinthos (found at close proximity to Patra),¹⁷⁷ with further information claiming the subsequent transfer of most of the minors to a “safe zone” in the Pre-Removal detention Center of Amygdaleza (Athens). It seems that in their cases –as in so many others’– “suitability” meant submitting them to, at least, an initial period of detention.

Despite this, not a week later (22 May 2018), some of the factories' former inhabitants and aspiring new ones have been reportedly returning to Patra,¹⁷⁸ highlighting once more the futility of what in principle could have been a welcome action, when people in search of a (better) life are left with no alternatives other than those of further risking their lives to reach their destination. This is why, –notwithstanding the necessity to monitor the situation for upcoming developments– this belated transfer changes little, when considered in the context of the overall, Greek-wide situation for refugees and asylum seekers, and ultimately why –if a writer's comment is allowed– despite recent developments, the decision taken was to not remove, re-edit or otherwise change this chapter. Because as long as deterrence, confinement and victimization form the rule of the day, when it comes to the treatment of asylum seekers, the conditions described will always be relevant; there will always be another Patra.

¹⁵³ In the context of another of GCR's projects, a follow-up visit was also conducted on the 30th of March 2018.

¹⁵⁴ During the crisis of 2015 and up to the first months of 2016 when intra-European borders were still open for refugees, Idomeni functioned as the entry point to the so-called “Balkan Route”, providing for a relatively safe(r) passage for those wishing to reach (primarily) Germany from Greece. During that time, attempts at (irregularly) exiting Greece via the port of Patra were virtually non-existent, with Patra's derelict factories (see further below), which have today transformed into de facto makeshift camps for refugees, asylum seekers and vulnerable migrants, at the time housed a single man. Information acquired during interview with MdM in Patra, on 29 November 2017.

¹⁵⁵ To be noted, some initiatives to address the matter have been undertaken by inter alia the local Municipality, which has supplied one of the factories (Ladopoulos) with showers and has been assisting in maintaining a rudimentary cleanliness to the place. Yet, no matter how important, local initiatives cannot make up for the lack of central planning and intervention. See Sto kokkino, ‘Πάτρα: Επιχείρηση καθαριότητας από το Δήμο του Λαδόπουλου όπου διαμένουν πρόσφυγες’ [Patra: Cleaning operation by the Municipality at Ladopoulos, where refugees reside], *sto kokkino*, 28 July 2017,

<<http://www.stokokkino.gr/article/100000000060656/Patra-Epixeirisi-kathariotita-apo-to-Dimo-stou-Ladopoulou-opou-diamenoun-prosfuges-rn>>, last accessed 29 March 2018, and The best, 'Ντουζιέρες και στο μέλλον χημικές τουαλέτες για τους μετανάστες στον Λαδόπουλο' [Shower and in the future chemical toilets for migrants at Ladopoulos], *the best*, 2 December 2017, <<http://www.thebest.gr/news/index/viewStory/466275>>, last accessed 29 March 2018.

¹⁵⁶ CNN reporter. Interview held on 27 November 2017.

¹⁵⁷ Information acquired via interviews with representatives of the port authorities (29 November 2017) and Praksis, in Patra (30 November 2017).

¹⁵⁸ Approximately 80%, as per information acquired during our interviews with the Director and representatives of the Police Directorate of Patra. Meeting held on 29 November 2017.

¹⁵⁹ To be noted based on observations made during the follow-up visit of 30 March 2018, this trend had seemingly been reverted. The visit was joined by a Pashto-, Urdu- and Farsi-speaking interpreter and, as per discussions held with the desolated factories' inhabitants, it proved that most where nationals of Afghanistan. Furthermore, as per their statements, most had arrived in Greece via the Evros land border –many, without being registered– while some 80-90 were unaccompanied minors.

¹⁶⁰ Indeed, if not for initiatives undertaken by the local civil society (Motion for the support of Refugees' and Migrants' Rights), the Municipality, NGOs (MdM, Praksis) and intergovernmental organisations (IOM), that have on more than one occasion engaged with treatment campaigns, the situation could have grown largely out of proportions.

¹⁶¹ Information acquired through meeting with volunteer doctors of Doc Mobile, in Patra, on November 30, 2017. Doc Mobile is one of few organizations that try to assist asylum seekers under these conditions. At the time of both our visits (29-30 November 2017 and 30 March 2018) they were providing primary health services in the desolated factories on a daily basis.

¹⁶² Also, Kontrafouris, F., 'Refugees in Patras a fence and ferry away from a better life in Europe', *CGTN America*, 24 December 2017, <<https://america.cgtn.com/2017/12/24/patras-greece-refugees-migrants-fence-ferry-europe>>, last accessed 26 March 2018.

¹⁶³ Information inter alia acquired during interview with CNN Greece reporter on 27 November 2017.

¹⁶⁴ BBC, *Cat and mouse: Migrants and police in Greece* [video], BBC News, 16 May 2017, <<http://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-europe-39931365/migrant-in-greece-it-is-very-dangerous-here>>, last accessed 29 March 2018.

¹⁶⁵ For more, Pliakos, K., 'Η «Ειδομένη της Πάτρας» (Μέρος 1ο)' [The "Idomeni of Patra" (Part 1)], 15 October 2017, *CNN Greece*, <<http://www.cnn.gr/focus/story/101631/h-eidomeni-tis-patras-meros-1o>>, last accessed 30 March 2018, and 'Πάτρα: Το λιμάνι της αγωνίας για εκατοντάδες πρόσφυγες και μετανάστες (Μέρος 2ο)' [Patra: the port of despair for hundreds of refugees and migrants], 16 October 2017, *CNN Greece*, <<http://www.cnn.gr/focus/story/101645/patra-to-limani-tis-agonias-gia-ekaton-tades-prosfyges-kai-metanastes-meros-2o>>, last accessed 30 March 2018.

¹⁶⁶ Information acquired during interview with Praksis representative in Patra on 30 November 2017.

¹⁶⁷ Data acquired following the interview-meeting held with representatives of Patra's port authorities on 29 November 2017.

¹⁶⁸ See Limenika nea, 'ΠΑΤΡΑ Ρεκόρ συλλήψεων αλλοδαπών στο Λιμάνι της Πάτρας' [Record arrests of third-country nationals/non-nationals at the port of Patra], *limenika nea*, 26 January 2018, <http://www.limenikanea.gr/2018/01/blog-post_747.html#.Ws30li5uZdg>, last accessed 26 March 2018, and Pelop, 'Πάτρα: Τριπλασιασμός των συλλήψεων στο λιμάνι μέσα στο 2017' [Threefold increase in the number of arrests at the port in 2017], *pelop*, 17 January 2018, <<http://pelop.gr/?page=article&DocID=431565&srv=9>>, last accessed 26 March 2018.

¹⁶⁹ See The Best News, 'Νέα μέτρα στο λιμάνι της Πάτρας για το μεταναστευτικό - Στον ISPS οι πλάστιγγες, ξεκινά η κατασκευή της ζώνης περιπολίας' [New measures at the Patras port for the migration issue – at ISPS the scales, construction of the patrol zone begins], *The Best News*, 25 December 2017, <<http://www.thebest.gr/news/index/viewStory/467916>>, last accessed 30 March 2018 and The Best News, 'Με 20 Λιμενικούς ενισχύεται το Λιμάνι της Πάτρας- Επιτέλους μπαίνει φράχτης στον αγώνα για το μεταναστευτικό' [The Patras port is reinforced with 20 port guards – a fence is finally placed in the struggle on migration], *The Best News*, 21 August 2017, <<http://www.thebest.gr/news/index/viewStory/453830>>, last accessed 30 March 2018.

¹⁷⁰ Fannon, F., *The Wretched of the Earth*, Penguin Books, London, 2001.

¹⁷¹ Member of the local solidarity group: Movement for the support of the rights of Refugees and Migrants. Interview held on 30 November 2017.

¹⁷² Information acquired during interviews with members of the Motion for the support of Refugees' and Migrants' Rights and with Doc Mobile, on 30 November 2017. Furthermore, during our follow-up visit on the 30th of March 2018, many of the foreign nationals/stateless persons, with who we discussed –the visit was joined by one of GCR's interpreters, therefore communication was possible– reported being increasingly abused by port and private security personnel guarding the port. ***Some reported being electrocuted with stun guns***, while one of the minors we met had a broken arm, after being beaten.

¹⁷³ Indicatively, see Iefimerida, 'Πάτρα: Άγρια επεισόδια με μετανάστες -Αστυνομικοί & λιμενικοί απειλούν με κινητοποιήσεις [Patra: Wild incidents with migrants – police and port authorities threaten with mobilizations], *iefimerida*, 5 March 2018, <<http://www.iefimerida.gr/news/400607/patra-agria-epeisodia-me-metanastes-astynomikoi-limenikoi-apeiloun-me-kinitopoiiseis>>, last accessed 29 March 2018; Newsbomb, 'Εμπόλεμη ζώνη το λιμάνι της Πάτρας: Μετανάστες επιτέθηκαν σε Λιμενικό και τον τραυμάτισαν!' [The warzone port of Patra: Migrants attacked and injured a port official!], *newbomb*, 4 February 2018, <<http://www.newsbomb.gr/ellada/news/story/858154/empolemi-zoni-to-limani-tis-patras-metanastes-epitethikan-se-limeniko-kai-ton-traymatisan>>, last accessed 29 March 2018.

¹⁷⁴ Proto Thema, 'Πάτρα: Ένας νεκρός από άγριες συμπλοκές μεταναστών με ρόπαλα στο λιμάνι', [Patra: One dead following fierce clashes with bats between migrants at the port], *Proto Thema*, 4 May 2018, <<https://www.protothema.gr/greece/article/784652/agries-sublokes-metanaston-me-ropala-sto-limani-tis-patras/>>, last accessed 24 May 2018.

¹⁷⁵ Left, 'Δ. Βίτσας: Σε έτοιμες δομές φιλοξενίας θα μεταφερθούν οι 500 μετανάστες της Πάτρας' [D. Vitsas: The 500 migrants of Patra shall be moved to ready-made hosting structures], *left*, 16 March 2018, <<https://left.gr/news/d-vitsas-se-etoimes-domes-filoxenias-tha-metaferthoun-oi-500-metanastes-tis-patras>> last accessed 26 March 2018.

¹⁷⁶ HuffPost Greece, 'Ολοκληρώθηκε επιχείρηση της αστυνομίας στο λιμάνι της Πάτρας για την απομάκρυνση εκατοντάδων μεταναστών' [Police operation for the removal of hundreds of migrants at Patra's port, completed], *HuffPost Greece*, 15 May 2018, <https://www.huffingtonpost.gr/entry/se-ex-elixe-epicheirese-tes-astenomias-sto-limani-tes-patras-via-ten-apomakrense-ekaton-tadon-metanaston-gr_5afa6422e4b09a94524b7cf7>, last accessed 24 May 2018; I Efimerida, '450 αστυνομικοί απομακρύνουν τους μετανάστες από το λιμάνι της Πάτρας -Τεράστια επιχείρηση' [450 policemen remove migrants from Patra's port – Huge operation], *I efimerida*, 15 May 2018, <http://www.iefimerida.gr/news/416379/450-astynomikoi-apomakrynoyn-toys-metanastes-apo-limani-tis-patras-terastia-epiheirisi?utm_source=iefimerida.gr&utm_medium=os&utm_campaign=os_notification>, last accessed 24 May 2018.

¹⁷⁷ Also confirmed in media articles. Indicatively, The best news, 'Στην Κόρινθο οι μετανάστες και οι πρόσφυγες από την Πάτρα - Νέες ΦΩΤΟ από την πρωινή επιχείρηση "σκούπα"' [At Korinthos the migrants and refugees from Patra – New PHOTO from the morning "crackdown" operation], *the best news*, 15 May 2018, <<http://www.thebest.gr/news/index/viewStory/486782>>, last accessed 24 May 2018.

¹⁷⁸ Patras Times, 'Πάτρα: Επιστρέφουν οι μετανάστες – Γυρίζουν με τα πόδια μέσω παλαιάς Εθνικής' [Patra: Migrants return – They return by foot via the old national road], 22 May 2018, <<https://bit.ly/2KMUGM8>>, last accessed 23 May 2018.

Concluding remarks

“Push-backs, deterrence, detention, victimization, marginalization, criminalization and despair”; two years on, these are some of the primary, cumulative, effects that the EU-Turkey Statement and the resultant Greek system of first-line/border reception established to implement it, have brought on asylum seekers' lives. More precisely, these are some of the direct effects experienced by people –forcefully displaced or not– when ambiguous security concerns trample human rights and humanitarian values, transforming human beings into nothing more than numbers in a statistical equation (i.e. “flows”).

Yet two years on is a long time for this ongoing policy of dehumanization to keep drawing its legitimacy by reference to a “Crisis”,¹⁷⁹ as the very meaning of the word suggests a temporariness and exceptionality which has by now been far exceeded. Instead, this is for all means and purposes an increasingly consolidated phenomenon, whose primary effect is *“the creation of a pool of humans...left with no alternatives”*;¹⁸⁰ no alternatives for either regaining their lives or even a minimum standard of safety and sense of normality.

Indeed, though (first reception) conditions differ between the regions examined in this report, with each displaying specificities and shortcomings of its own (e.g. more/less use of detention), they all converge in that they not only fail to provide adequate protection to de facto vulnerable individuals and groups, but also end up further victimizing them with a similar degree of banality. It is not that the situation has remained fixed during past years or that some ad hoc solutions have not been sought or at least attempted. It is rather that, at its core, the very nature of the EU/Greek response to the Refugee Issue is one that a priori excludes any possibility of providing humane reception and living conditions to those arriving at the Greek borders. Simply put, there is an intrinsic incompatibility between the primacy placed on a policy/Statement (the response) whose declared purpose is to *“end the irregular migration from Turkey to the EU”*,¹⁸¹ and any and all attempts at respecting asylum seekers’ –themselves, “irregular” newcomers– rights. A case that becomes all the more evident considering the means by which this policy has been pursued on the European side of the borders: that is, through the entrapment of newcomers in secluded, prison-type facilities, so as to both expedite/facilitate their deportation in a country (Turkey) with a worrying human rights record,¹⁸² and have their dehumanization serve as a warning to anyone else even remotely considering Europe as a friendly destination.

*“If you want to learn what fear, hunger and cold is, [just] come here”.*¹⁸³

It is indicative that in the years following the Statement’s implementation and the concomitant containment of newcomers on the islands, the situation has been steamrolling on a self-perpetuating downward spiral, whose inevitable instances of critical deterioration are followed by sporadic, last-minute attempts at bringing the situation to “manageable”, yet never humane, levels. Between mid-October and the 22nd of December 2017, for instance, a state initiative was undertaken with the aim of improving conditions in the highly overcrowded and unsuitable island RICs, in what was arguably a last-minute attempt at preventing the further loss of life during yet another winter (as was the case in 2016). Though results were significant, in that some 6,000 asylum seekers were rapidly transferred to mainland Greece,¹⁸⁴ at its core the action was characterized by a crisis-management approach, rather than one aimed at creating long-term sustainability either on the islands or with respect to the Refugee Issue as a whole –something that could have feasibly been pursued through shifting the reception locus from the islands to the mainland and increasing the latter’s capacity to accommodate asylum seekers in decent conditions for the duration of their stay.

Thus even at the time (22 December 2017) thousands of asylum seekers (10,916, specifically) remained trapped in island RICs meant to accommodate a maximum of 5,576,¹⁸⁵ as further island decongestion stumbled upon the mainland's dwindling capacity to accommodate both previous residents and those increasingly amassing on the islands.¹⁸⁶ Five months on (21st of May 2018), and highlighting the ever-present deadlock, with which the ongoing policy of deterrence is intertwined, conditions at the borders are once more back to critical levels, with the islands "accommodating" 17,029 asylum seekers, of whom 13,828 in RICs under horrid conditions.¹⁸⁷ Yet this time around, and for the first time in years, April 2018 also saw the Greek-Turkish land borders of Evros becoming the major point of entry for asylum seekers, with arrivals nearly reaching –and, per some, exceeding¹⁸⁸– the combined respective numbers on the islands (2,900 as opposed to 3,032),¹⁸⁹ and in turn further inflating an explosive situation.

The results? At the end of April (24 April 2018, specifically), some 1,000 Evros-based asylum seekers –amongst whom many unaccompanied children and families– remained detained in police precincts and pre-Removal Centers, under conditions similar to or worse than those described in preceding chapters, while awaiting for their initial registration to take place at the over-congested Fylakio RIC (pre-RIC detention); an increasing, yet still unknown, number of asylum seekers living fully unprotected in conditions of homelessness throughout Greece (and especially Thessaloniki), and more than 1,500 island-based asylum seekers, whose geographical restriction had already been lifted (due to their being vulnerable, for instance), all hopelessly awaiting to be transferred to proper accommodation in the mainland, where spaces have been virtually exhausted.¹⁹⁰ In the meantime, with no indications of decreasing arrivals in the near future, as some 1,000 newcomers have arrived on the islands only within the first 10 days of May,¹⁹¹ it is becoming increasingly safe to argue that the first-line system of reception will, for yet another time, be unable to provide (decent) shelter to inbound refugees and asylum seekers.

Could this have been averted? Arguably the matter is multifaceted, and perhaps the "wisdom" concomitant to examining an event in retrospect, to an extent diverts from the day-to-day conundrums arising in the management of such a volatile situation, some of which pertain to internal parameters (e.g. seeming resistance of some municipalities towards additional camps being built within their jurisdiction), others to external (e.g. a previously failed and currently non-existent EU relocation mechanism, amidst increasing barriers placed to family reunification in other MS), and all of which would necessitate a detailed examination that by far exceeds the scope of this report. Yet notwithstanding the multiple loci of accountability (local, national, international) for this situation, it remains a fact that no preparations for these eventualities were made, despite it being a relative certainty –as always– that irregular arrivals would increase during the spring-summer months. Instead, the excessive insistence on maintaining the island-based policy of deterrence and confinement largely guaranteed the system's un-

preparedness to cope with the ever-evolving situation, as it prohibited any considerations or actions towards establishing an alternative system of (mainland-based) reception.

It is primarily in this context that the response's very foundation, structured as it is around the EU's increasing tendency to externalize and avoid its common responsibilities (EU-Turkey Statement), Turkey's denial of accepting back any asylum seekers that have been transferred off the islands (as per to-day practice),¹⁹² and Greece's willingness to oblige, a priori conditions the response's potential results to a spectrum of diverging degrees of "discounts", but never the respect of human rights. Indeed, the latter has perhaps become nowhere near more evident than in the events that followed the recent ruling of the Greek Council of State (CoS) –Greece's highest administrative court– on the geographical restriction of asylum seekers to the island hotspots.

On the 17th of April 2018, and following legal actions undertaken by GCR, the Greek CoS ruled in favor of annulling the restriction on liberty imposed on newly-arrived asylum seekers on the islands. An imposition, to be noted, which only became accessible to public scrutiny and legal action more than a year following the Statement's implementation, through a decision belatedly issued by the former Head of the GAS, on May 31, 2017.¹⁹³ That being said, the CoS judged that said decision did not contain the necessary-legal justification for limiting newcomers' freedom to the islands (indeed, said decision contained no justification, at all),¹⁹⁴ thus calling for its withdrawal. Furthermore, and though the ruling focused near exclusively on the decision's technical aspects, without so much as a reference to the restriction's effects on refugees' and asylum seekers' lives, the CoS still did recognize the actual and "*serious danger of arising social tensions*",¹⁹⁵ posed by the unequal distribution/concentration of large numbers of persons in a limited array of geographical regions (i.e. the hotspot islands), instead of the wider territory.

This could have been an opportunity to redress the ongoing abasement of human rights and values within the EU. Instead, just three days later, on the 20th of April 2018 and in what has become a highly criticized move,¹⁹⁶ the newly appointed Director of the GAS went forward with reinstating the geographical limitation. Albeit, this time, the imposition was accompanied by an official justification, invoking grounds of "*public order and especially...the implementation of the Joint EU-Turkey Statement of 18-3-2016*".¹⁹⁷

Fast-forward to the 23rd of April (six days following the ruling), in an incident that arguably echoed the CoS's recognition of the risk of social tensions, a group of Afghan refugees were brutally attacked at the Sappho square, in Lesbos. The refugees, who had for six days been protesting at the square against delays in the examination of their (asylum) claims and living conditions at the Moria RIC, were thrown at with stones and various other objects (Molotov cocktails and tear gas grenades, amongst others), while far-right segments of the gathered crowd were calling for their extermination ("burn them alive").¹⁹⁸

It is by reference to this incident, reminiscent of Europe's darker, yet creepingly re-emerging, times that this report concludes, in hopes that yet another warning call may at long last be heard and acted upon. To this end, what follows is a list of non-exhaustive, core recommendations aimed at facilitating the transition from a deficient system of reception, to one that will ensure the respect of newcomers' rights. As a preliminary comment, however, it needs to be stressed that in order for any effective "reformation" of the current reception system to take place, the a priori condition is to recognize the matter in its proper context. This means not only reverting the current paradigm from that of politics and deterrence (or the politics of deterrence) to that of legal rights and (state) obligations, but also recognizing the instrumental role played jointly by Greece, the EU and EU member states in assisting in its consolidation, by near exclusively focusing on diminishing arrivals at the expense of human rights and values. Besides, as aptly recognized by the Council of Europe in Resolution 2118 (2016),¹⁷⁹ *"Much of the responsibility for the current situation falls to the European Union, which has tacitly supported the closure of borders along the western Balkans route and concluded the agreement of 18 March 2016 with Turkey"*. The solution, therefore, needs similarly be a collective one, encompassing the actual sharing of responsibility and the effective display of solidarity towards both forcefully displaced populations, and amongst EU member states themselves. It is in this spirit that the following recommendations have been drafted, and in this context that they should be read.

¹⁷⁹ Or *"a temporary and extraordinary measure which is necessary to end the human suffering and restore public order"*, as the Statement's wording would have it. See European Council, op.cit.

¹⁸⁰ Representative of Praxis. Interview conducted on 30 November 2017. To be noted, the quote is taken slightly out of context, though it applies in this one as well.

¹⁸¹ European Council, op.cit.

¹⁸² There is no shortage of reports on the matter. Indicatively: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), *Turkey: UN report details extensive human rights violations during protracted state of emergency* [media release], 20 March 2018, <<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22853>>, last accessed 20 May 2018; Muižnieks, N., 'Human rights in Turkey – the urgent need for a new beginning', *euronews*, 10 March 2017, <<https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/human-rights-in-turkey-the-urgent-need-for-a-new-beginning?desktop=false>>, last accessed 20 May 2018, and Erkoyun, E., 'As Turkey's emergency rule continues, so will rights abuses, Amnesty says', *Reuters*, 22 February 2018, <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-security-rights/as-turkeys-emergency-rule-continues-so-will-rights-abuses-amnesty-says-idUSKCN1G61VU>>, last accessed 20 May 2018.

¹⁸³ Female Syrian-Palestinian refugee on conditions at the Moria RIC, in Lesbos. Y., B., Tonella, "Av θέλετε να μάθετε τι εστί φόβος, πεινά και κρύο, ελάτε εδώ" [If you want to know what cold, hunger and cold is, come here], *Amnesty International*, 19 March 2018, <<https://www.amnesty.gr/blog/21328/thelete-na-mathete-ti-esti-fovos-peina-kai-kryo-elate-edo>>, last accessed 21 May 2018.

¹⁸⁴ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Situation on Greek islands still grim despite speeded transfers* [briefing note], 22 December 2017, <<http://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2017/12/5a3ccd394/situation-greek-islands-still-grim-despite-speeded-transfers.html>>, last accessed 30 March 2018.

¹⁸⁵ Hellenic Republic, Ministry of Digital Policy, Telecommunications and Information, National Situational Picture regarding the Islands at Eastern Aegean Sea (22/12/2017), 23 December 2017, <<https://bit.ly/2Lm66rA>>, last accessed 21 May 2018.

¹⁸⁶ This, to be noted, was despite joint UNHCR and IOM efforts to assist through the creation of temporary accommodation spaces in hotels, which in itself being an exceptional measure that cannot

be counted perpetually upon, in the context of a state-centric management of Migration, further serves to highlight the policy's long-term non-sustainability.

¹⁸⁷ Hellenic Republic, Ministry of Digital Policy, Telecommunications and Information, National Situational Picture regarding the Islands at Eastern Aegean Sea (21/05/2018), 7 May 2018, <<https://bit.ly/2IF0vc5>>, last accessed 23 May 2018.

¹⁸⁸ A series of articles have been claiming nearly 4,000 new arrivals via Evros during April. Albeit the information seem to be based on relevant data on illegal entry provided by the police for the totality of the Eastern Macedonia and Thrace region (of which Evros is a part), and therefore it cannot be safely concluded that they pertain solely to Evros-based arrivals from Turkey. Indicatively, T. Georgiopolou, '4.000 πρόσφυγες πέρασαν τον Απρίλιο από τον Έβρο' [4,000 refugees crossed Evros in April], *I Kathimerini*, 9 May 2018, <<http://www.kathimerini.gr/963220/article/epikairothta/ellada/4000-prosfyges-perasan-ton-aprilio-apo-ton-evro>>, last accessed 21 May 2018 and Proto Thema, 'Αύξηση σοκ στον Έβρο: 4.000 μετανάστες διέσχισαν τα σύνορα σ' ένα μήνα' [Shocking increase at Evros: 4,000 migrants crossed the borders in a month], *Proto Thema*, 8 May 2018, <<https://www.protothema.gr/greece/article/785594/auxisi-sok-ston-evro-4000-metanastes-dieshisan-ta-sunora-s-ena-mina>>, last accessed 21 May 2018.

¹⁸⁹ See UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *UNHCR appeals to Greece over situation at Evros* [briefing note], 27 April 2018, <<http://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2018/4/5ae2dd764/unhcr-appeals-greece-situation-evros.html>>, last accessed 21 May 2018 and UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Greece Sea Arrivals Dashboard (April 2018)*, 5 May 2018, <<https://data2.unhcr.org/es/documents/download/63494>>, last accessed 21 May 2018.

¹⁹⁰ Information acquired during the Protection Working Group (PWG) of 22 April 2018. The PWG is a nation-wide, information-focused, meeting held and hosted by UNHCR on a monthly basis in Athens.

¹⁹¹ As per data acquired through UNHCR's operation portal for Greece, on 11 May 2018. The data are updated regularly and can be found at <<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean/location/5179>>.

¹⁹² As inter alia stated in the new Asylum Service's Director decision (8269/2018) re-imposing the geographical restriction of asylum seekers on the islands, as well as in the CoS decision (805/2018) that had previously annulled said restriction. The first, and parts of the latter can be found, in Greek, at <https://www.e-nomothesia.gr/kat-allodapoi/prosfyges-politiko-asulo/apophase-oik-8269-2018-phek-1366b-20-4-2018.html> and <http://www.immigration.gr/2018/04/8052018.html>, respectively.

¹⁹³ Previously, the restriction was enforced de jure, via a police circular and on the basis of the EU-Turkey Statement, without, however, any publicly available administrative decision on the matter.

¹⁹⁴ The Decision can be found in Greek, at <<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B7hvGv7tFH2QaC1STIR4dE05S2c/view>>.

¹⁹⁵ Council of State decision 805/2018, para. 15, p.20.

¹⁹⁶ Indicatively, Greek Council for Refugees, *GCR Press Release on the reinstatement of CoS's annulled decision* [media release], 23 April 2018, <<https://www.gcr.gr/index.php/en/news/press-releases-announcements/item/872-pligma-sto-kratos-dikaou>>, last accessed 23 May 2018; Greek Council for Refugees, *21 rights organizations condemn the government's attempt to overturn the court de-*

cision ending the containment policy [joint media release], 24 April 2018, <<https://www.gcr.gr/index.php/en/news/press-releases-announcements/item/874-21-organoseis-katadikazoun>>, last accessed 23 May 2018.

¹⁹⁷ Decision 8269/2018, Gov. Gazzete 1366/B/20-4-2018, Περιορισμός κυκλοφορίας των αιτούντων διεθνή προστασία. ΑΠΟΦΑΣΗ ΤΟΥ ΔΙΕΥΘΥΝΤΗ ΤΗΣ ΥΠΗΡΕΣΙΑΣ ΑΣΥΛΟΥ [Restriction of movement of international protection applicants. DECISION OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE ASYLUM SERVICE], 20 April 2018, <<http://www.et.gr/index.php/anazitisi-fek>>, last accessed 23 May 2018.

¹⁹⁸ G., Pagoudis, ‘Τους περικύκλωσαν, τους άνοιξαν τα κεφάλια και έφυγαν ανενόχλητοι’ [They surrounded them, cracked their heads and left undisturbed], *efsyn*, 24 April 2018, <<http://www.efsyn.gr/arthro/toys-perikyklus-toys-anoixan-ta-kefalia-kai-efygan-anenohlitoi>>, last accessed 21 May 2018; V., Paikos, ‘Κάψτε τους ζωντανούς!’ [Burn them alive!], *I Avgi*, 29 April 2018, <<http://www.avgi.gr/article/10811/8863545/kapste-tous-zontanous>>, last accessed 21 May 2018.

¹⁹⁹ Council of Europe: Parliamentary Assembly, *Resolution 2118 - Refugees in Greece: challenges and risks – A European responsibility*, 21 June 2016, <<http://www.refworld.org/docid/583734f54.html>>, last accessed 21 May 2018]

Recommendations

General Recommendations

The EU, alongside Greece, should as a matter of priority reconsider the alleged “benefits” of the EU-Turkey Statement which, though leading to diminished Greek-bound irregular arrivals, has adversely affected the lives of forcefully displaced populations. Two years on, it is becoming more evident by the day that, at its core, the Statement is a recipe for (humanitarian) disaster, as its constitutive elements (deterrence and externalization of international responsibilities) and mode of implementation (transformation of hotspot islands into “open prisons”) a priori deny international protection applicants effective access to the full set (and at times any) of their rights. This, to be noted, is the case at the same time as the Statement’s declared *raison d’être* –i.e. “to break the business model of the smugglers and to offer migrants an alternative to putting their lives at risk”²⁰⁰– has proven an illusion, as not only have third-country nationals/stateless persons not stopped risking their lives in search of a safe haven, but by being left with few to no alternatives to safely reaching their destination, the Statement has all but guaranteed their further victimization at the hands of smugglers.

Therefore:

1. The EU-Turkey Statement should be reconsidered and ultimately abolished in favor of a policy that would reposition human rights at the forefront of its agenda.
2. In the same vein, compliance with the imperative to respect the (human) rights of all people on the move, irrelevantly of actual and/or potential international protection status, should form the core principle guiding the management of migration. Ongoing discriminations of newcomers’ on the basis of predetermined, biased, views on their “chances” and motives for applying for asylum inter alia contravene article 3 of the Geneva Convention and article 14 of the EU Convention on Human Rights, and should therefore be immediately brought to a halt.

3. EU member states alongside Greece should provide asylum seekers with appropriate and effective, safe legal channels for reaching the EU, while facilitating, instead of obstructing, the reunification of families, as has increasingly been the case throughout past months.
4. In this context, upcoming discussions on the reconsideration of the Dublin Regulation should focus on finding ways for sharing, rather than outsourcing responsibilities at the fringes of (or beyond) the EU. In doing so, the views and wishes of asylum seekers, as well as their wider family links should also be taken into consideration, in harmonization with both the realities of forced displacement (uniting remaining, rather than exclusively “nuclear”, family members), and beneficiaries’ cultural norms and customs.

Access to (first-line) Reception and Asylum

Granting third-country nationals/stateless persons access to asylum and reception is a positive (legal) obligation of the Greek and EU member states, as enshrined in article 18 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.²⁰¹ Despite this, an increasing number of reports and allegations on push-backs being enforced at the Greek-Turkish land borders of Evros have come into the limelight during recent years, with the Greek state as of yet showing no indications of any intentions to give the matter its proper gravity and address it.

It is to be reminded that, aside from directly exposing third-country nationals/stateless persons to a series of life-threatening risks, as well as to exposing them to inhumane and degrading treatment, collective expulsions are strictly prohibited under Article 19 (1 and 2) of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, as well as article 33(1) of the Geneva Convention on the status of refugees.²⁰²

Therefore, the Greek Government should:

5. Order the long-due investigation of the multiple reports and allegations on push-backs enacted at the Evros land borders and ensure that all perpetrators are found and brought to justice. This investigation should be conducted in an in-depth and transparent manner, with all stakeholders informed of its evolution and outcomes, and victims provided remedy for the injustice.
6. Establish an independent body that will be responsible for monitoring the situation at Greece’s northeastern borders, at least until such time as it can be safely and unambiguously argued that no newcomer is arbitrarily stripped of their right to seek asylum and/or exposed to the risk of *refoulement*.
7. Undertake all necessary actions to ensure that upon arrival in Greece, all third-country nationals and stateless persons are swiftly transferred to an open RIC or other competent, short-term, transit facility, where they can be registered, provided with the necessary primary care, informed on their rights and obligations and granted access international protection. Inter alia, this also necessitates

providing adequate training to police and border guard personnel, whom in many cases serving as the first point of contact between newcomers and the EU/Greek state, are also the first officials/representatives of the state responsible for safeguarding these rights.

Detention and other types of restrictions

It is highly worrying that following the Statement's implementation, blanket detention and limits to the freedom of third-country nationals/stateless persons have once more been increasingly employed as de facto means for managing migration, either throughout the asylum process (detention and geographical restriction of liberty), or in preparation for its delayed commencement (pre-RIC detention).

In this context it is to be reminded that measures leading to or aimed at curbing asylum seekers' liberty are to be strictly and only ever be used as measures of last resort, following consideration and exhaustion of all possible, less coercive, alternatives, on a case-by-case basis, in accordance with national and international law and legislation, and subject to the provision of the necessary mechanisms for the remedy of the injured party (i.e. asylum seekers).

Accordingly, the Greek state should:

8. Immediately and without delay end the so-called pre-RIC detention of asylum seekers in Evros, which aside from having no grounding in law, also serves to further victimize vulnerable persons and groups.
9. Similarly and in line with the principle of non-discrimination, the "pilot/low-recognition nationality" detention project on the islands and in every other location where such discriminatory treatment applies should be brought to a halt. Biased treatment of asylum seekers on the basis of individual/protected characteristics (e.g. nationality or gender) not only contravenes the non-discrimination principle, but also highlights an intrinsically predisposed and thus malfunctioning system of asylum and reception.
10. Immediately transfer all asylum seekers out of detention cells and Pre-Removal Centers and into suitable accommodation, and put an end to the use of such facilities in the future. It is unacceptable for any person to be exposed to the kind of inhumane and degrading conditions characteristic of cells and Pre-Removal Centers, let alone persons fleeing persecution.
11. Ensure that vulnerable asylum seekers and especially children are never detained. Vulnerable asylum seekers should be treated in accordance with, at least, the minimum standards set forth by the Reception Directive, and as a rule provided with appropriate shelter, where their specific needs can be met.
12. Abolish and/or minimize the use of geographical restriction to only the absolute necessary, for the identification and registration processes to take place, time. As it stands, the policy of island-confinement not only serves to leave newcomers without proper access to crucial services (e.g. healthcare), but also adversely

affects local communities, giving rise to xenophobic tensions which, prior to the Statement's implementation, were virtually non-existent or invisible.

First reception and living conditions

While recognizing efforts made on some aspects of the (first-line) reception of third-country nationals/stateless persons in Greece, there is still much more that needs to be done if the rights of newcomers are to be fully respected throughout their stay in Greece. It remains a fact that two years on, a series of deficiencies (in both facilities and personnel) keep dragging down the system as a whole, leading to the ever-exposure of asylum seekers to a series of risks (to their life, security, and well-being).

Therefore the Greek Government, alongside and with the support of the EC and EU member states should:

13. Work towards creating and implementing a model reception-accommodation scheme that will be structured around rapidly filtering registered asylum seekers from border RICs to suitable accommodation in mainland Greece, and from there to either more integration-friendly accommodation places (apartments) in Greece or, depending on the needs arising on the filed in terms of the ever-fluctuating number of arrivals, in other MSs. Expecting a single (or a few) country(/ies) to fulfill the humanitarian obligations of a continent, means not only underestimating the extent of the (volatile) Refugee Issue, but also minimizing chances of addressing it in a humane manner by “sweeping it under the carpet”.
14. Significantly enhance RIC capacity to assist and process arrivals, by deploying additional personnel (especially doctors, interpreters and cultural mediators) and enhancing its effectiveness through continuous training. Perpetually re-cycling personnel (e.g. of the GAS) through fixed-term contracts, means failing to establish a skilled and specialized workforce, by not investing in already available expertise.
15. Ensure the sufficient presence of specialized medical professionals at the borders, taking into account the increased needs arising from the cohabitation of asylum seekers and local populations. As things stand, the ongoing gaps characteristic of the overburdened public healthcare system at the borders, not only fail to guarantee adequate assistance to both communities (locals and asylum seekers), but also serve to increase tensions by at times giving the impression of a preferential system, whereby asylum seekers' needs are prioritized over and above those of locals.
16. As a minimum, ensure the presence of at least one working doctor on a 24hr basis in each RIC and large-scale accommodation facility for refugees and asylum seekers.

17. Drastically improve conditions at the RICs, by primarily expanding mainland accommodation capacity and transferring registered (especially, vulnerable) asylum seekers there. As per their original purpose, island hotspots, as well as the Evros RIC, should function as short-term, transit facilities, for the filtering of newcomers, instead of as quasi-detention/accommodation grounds.
18. Ensure that all newcomers are assessed for potential (medical and/or psychosocial) vulnerabilities as a priority following their arrival, and prior to their asylum interview.
19. Tend to the safety of asylum seekers by ensuring that all RICs and accommodation sites have, as a minimum, gate-supervision throughout all days and hours.
20. Similarly take all necessary steps to minimize the risk of SGBV (e.g. gender-based showers in all RICs, adequate lighting throughout the night), and provide for facilities' adequate supervision.

²⁰⁰ European Council, *EU-Turkey statement, 18 March 2016* [media release], op.cit.

²⁰¹ "The right to asylum shall be guaranteed with due respect for the rules of the Geneva Convention of 28 July 1951 and the Protocol of 31 January 1967 relating to the status of refugees and in accordance with the Treaty establishing the European Community". See European Union, *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union*, 26 October 2012, 2012/C 326/02, <<http://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b3b70.html>>, last accessed 4 May 2018.

²⁰² UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Convention and Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees*, UNHCR [website], December 2010, <<http://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10.pdf>>, last accessed 26 March 2018.

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Annex I (list of interviews/region)

Evros

1. Hellenic Red Cross, 20 December 2017
2. RIC Director, 21 December 2017
3. METAdrasi: Action for Migration & Development, 21 December 2017
4. Director of Regional Asylum Office (RAO), 22 December 2017
5. UNHCR field office staff at the RIC at Fylakio, Evros, 22 December 2017

6. Police representatives at the Pre-Removal Center at Fylakio, Evros, 22 December 2017

Kos

1. RIC Director, 10 January 2018
2. Police representative at the Pre-Removal Center at Pyli, Kos, 10 January 2018
3. International Organization for Migration (IOM), 10 January 2018
4. Arsis: Association for the Social Support of Youth, 11 January 2018
5. UNHCR staff at Kos Field Office, 11 January 2018
6. Regional Asylum Office, 12 January 2018
7. Hellenic Center for Disease Control & Prevention (KEELPNO), 12 January 2018
8. METAdrasi: Action for Migration & Development, 12 January 2018
9. Director of 2nd Police Directorate of Dodekanisa, 12 January 2018
10. Solidarity Kos, 12 January 2018
11. Frontex, 10 January 2018

Lesvos

1. Members of the Lesvos Municipality, 12 December 2017
2. Director of the (open) Kara Tepe camp, 12 December 2017
3. Caritas Hellas, 13 December 2017
4. PIKPA, Lesvos, 13 December 2017
5. HIAS, 14 December 2017
6. Bashira Community and Empowerment Centre, 14 December 2017
7. Former Coordinator of the Education Sub-working Group, 14 December 2017
8. RIC sub-Director, 15 December 2017
9. Hellenic Center for Disease Control & Prevention (KEELPNO), 15 December 2017
10. RIS employees at the single women section (15.12.17)
11. RIS employees at the UAM section (15.12.17)
12. Representatives of UNHCR, 15 December 2017

Patra

1. CNN reporter, 27 November 2017
2. Patra port authorities, 29 November 2017
3. Director and representatives of the Police Directorate of Patra, 29 November 2017
4. Director of Regional Asylum Office (RAO), 29 November 2017
5. Médecins du Monde (Mdm), 29 November 2017
6. Praksis, 30 November 2017
7. Doc Mobile, 30 November 2017
8. Motion for the support of Refugees' and Migrants' Rights, 30 November 2017
9. International Organisation for Migration (IOM), 30 November 2017

Annex II (List of Abbreviations)

CoS: Council of State

CSO: Civil Society Organisation

EC: European Commission

EU: European Union

GAS: Greek Asylum Service

GCR: Greek Council for Refugees

HRC: Hellenic Red Cross

MS: Member State

RAO: Regional Asylum Office

RIS: Reception and Identification Service

RIC: Reception and Identification Center

SGBV: Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

UAM: Unaccompanied Minors

KEELPNO: Hellenic Center for Disease Control & Prevention (HCDCP)