

# Case WORK

## COUNTRY REPORT

GREECE

“SITUATION AND NEEDS OF THE VOLUNTEERS WORKING WITH  
REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS”



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# 1. Context and Background of Migration

## 1.1. Main characteristics of the migrants' presence: An overview – numbers, evolution and trends

Greece currently has a population of 11.14 million (2018 figures), based on the latest United Nations estimates. Greece, a founding member of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), has traditionally been one of the most important emigration countries post Second World War. National emigration flows lasted from 1952 to the mid-1970s. Millions of Greeks have migrated abroad to the U.S., the U.K., Germany, Canada and Australia over the last century, which has led to a great Greek diaspora. During the 1980s, Greece became a transit country for Eastern Europeans, Middle Easterners and Africans. From the beginning of the 1990s, Greece started receiving large inflows of migrants from Central and Eastern Europe following the collapse of the communist regimes, with some large numbers of migrants from Albania.

According to the latest official census (2011) the population comprised Greek citizens (91%), Albanian citizens (4.5%), Bulgarian citizens (0.7%), Romanian citizens (0.4%), Pakistani citizens (0.3%) and Georgian citizens (0.25%). The latest data (2016), reported by the European Migration Network, shows that out of the total population in Greece (10.75 million in 2016), 11.3% were foreign and foreign-born (3.2% other EU Member states, 8.1% non-Member countries).

From 2007, the number of irregular migrants and asylum seekers arriving in Greece by boat (from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iraq, Afghanistan, among others) via the Aegean Sea increased significantly. According to data from Frontex, Greece is the major gateway of undocumented migrants and asylum seekers from Africa and Asia. However, over the last few years, a shift from the sea to the land borders has taken place, resulting in increased illegal border crossings at the Greek land border with Turkey (Evros), mainly because the Greek state was assisted by Frontex in patrolling the sea borders. These illegal border crossings constituted approximately 85 per cent of all the detections of illegal border crossing at the EU-level. The majority of these irregular migrants, view Greece as a gateway to the European Union.

In order to cope with this situation, the Greek state implemented the Migration Law 3386/2005 (revised under Law 3536/2007), "Entry, residence and social integration of third country nationals into the Greek territory". Law 3907/2011 is an attempt to establish a realistic migration management system, through the operation of an independent Asylum Service, the establishment of First Reception Centres and the adaptation of Greek legislation to Community Directive 2008/115/EC on the return of irregular migrants.

## 1.2. Recent situation of the “refugee crisis” in the country

According to the UN, more than a million refugees crossed into Europe by the end of 2015. In 2017, more than 170,000 refugees and migrants reached Europe by sea. The increased number of refugees and migrants seeking a new life in Europe is largely a consequence of humanitarian crises around the world. The conflict in Syria continues to be by far the biggest driver of migration. But the ongoing violence in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as abuses in Eritrea, is also leading people to look for new lives elsewhere. The UN estimates that almost half of the people who have crossed the Mediterranean originate from Syria. Others began their journeys in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Iran, Nigeria, Somalia and Sudan.

Many of the refugees carry little more than the clothes they are wearing on their journeys. With European governments struggling to provide adequate support, tens of thousands of people every day need food, shelter, clean water and sanitation. The communities who welcome them are often struggling to survive themselves.

In 2017, 29,718 persons arrived in Greece by sea, compared to 173,450 sea arrivals in 2016. The majority of those who arrived in 2017 originated from Syria (42%), Iraq (20%) and Afghanistan (12%). More than half of the population were women (22%) and children (37%), while 41% were adult men. In addition, a total of 5,651 persons have been arrested at the Greek-Turkish land borders in 2017, compared to 3,300 persons during 2016.

Despite a drop in the number of refugees and migrants reaching Europe over the last two years, the dangers many face along the way have in some cases increased, according to a new report by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), establishing changing patterns of movement. As a result, the number of casualties has increased. In 2016, 5,096 people died or went missing whilst trying to enter Europe, and more than 3,081 people lost their lives in 2017. Most of those heading for Greece take the relatively short voyage from Turkey to the islands of Kos, Chios, Lesbos and Samos - often in flimsy rubber dinghies or small wooden boats. According to the IOM, in 2015, more than 800 died in the Aegean crossing from Turkey to Greece. The summer months are usually when most fatalities occur as it is the busiest time for migrants attempting to reach Europe.

While the overall number of Mediterranean crossings has remained far below the levels of 2016, the UNHCR report also found a rise in arrivals to Greece in the latter part of 2017. The total number of sea arrivals decreased compared to 2016, however, a 33 per cent rise was observed between May and December, 2017, with 24,600 arrivals compared to 18,300 in the same period in 2016. Most originated from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, including a high number of families with children. Asylum-seekers arriving by sea to Greece faced extended stays in overcrowded conditions on the Greek islands. Women, especially those travelling on their own, and unaccompanied children remain particularly exposed to risks of sexual and gender-based violence along routes to Europe and in some locations within Europe.

Local activists try to help. Residents—despite the serious disruption to their usual daily life—have stepped in to provide newly-arrived refugees with food, clothes, and medical attention, trying to fill the gaps of Greece’s asylum system. Food is often distributed by locals and NGOs.

### 1.3. Asylum system

Created in 2011, the Reception and Identification Service (R.I.S) is an independent agency under the Deputy Ministry of Migration Policy General Secretariat of Reception. The mission of the Reception and Identification Service is the effective management of third country nationals who cross the Hellenic borders without legal documents and/or procedures, under conditions that respect their dignity, by placing them in first reception procedures. The R.I.S. constitutes the Central Service and the Regional Reception and Identification Services. The Central Service, registered in Athens, has the responsibility of programming, planning and coordinating the activities that are taking place to the Regional Services. Regional Reception and Identification Services are the Reception and Identification Centres (R.I.C. – “Hotspots”) and the Mobile Units. In operation are five R.I.C in the Eastern Aegean Islands (Moria - Lesbos, Vial - Chios, Vathy – Samos, Lepida – Leros and Kos), one R.I.C on the Greek –Turkish border (Fylakio – Evros) and two mobile units. The asylum procedure in Greece has undergone substantial reform throughout 2016, driven mainly by the application of the EU-Turkey statement on 18 March 2016.

Procedures at R.I.C as well as at the Mobile Units include:

- Identity and nationality verification of the illegal incoming migrants
- Registration, a procedure that includes age assessment, for the cases of high importance such as that of minors
- Medical examination including the provision of health care as well as the provision of psychosocial support, if necessary
- Responsible information in relation to the rights and obligations of the persons concerned, as well as regarding the possibility of placing them under international protection status. In cases where the concerned party is able and also wishes to be placed under the international protection regime, he/she shall be referred to the regional Asylum Office. In cases where it is recorded that he/she is a vulnerable group member, all the necessary procedures will take place for the effective transfer to the most suitable welfare department

With the implementation of the Reception and Identification procedures, the third country citizens are referred to the competent services for their further administration:

- Foreign nationals that request international security regime are referred to the Asylum Service
- Vulnerable persons are referred to the National Centre for Social Solidarity (E.K.K.A.) in order to find the appropriate hosting structure
- The remaining foreign nationals are referred to the Hellenic Police (ΕΛ.ΑΣ) for further administrative procedures
- For all the interested parties stating their wish as voluntary return, the IOM is informed and undertakes the repatriation procedures
- Hellenic Police also undertake procedures of voluntary return (Aliens Division , Attica)

#### 1.3.1. The Asylum Procedure

**Asylum Service** registers the applications of persons seeking international protection. Twelve Regional Asylum Offices (RAO) and eleven Autonomous Asylum Units (AAU) were operational throughout the country as of March 2018. The Asylum Service is also able to apply the Dublin procedure, with most

requests and transfers concerning family reunification in other Member States, and to conclude pending relocation applications. All applications should be examined within three (accelerated procedure) or six months (regular procedure) but this period may be extended up to 18 months. As per 2017, almost one out of three applications was pending for more than six months from the day of full registration.

#### *The Asylum Procedure Steps:*

##### **Step 1 – Registration**

The asylum seeker obtains an appointment (via Skype) at the Asylum Service and is informed about the full registration date.

##### **Step 2 – Full registration**

On the date determined by the Asylum Service, the asylum seeker is interviewed by an Asylum Service employee.

The Asylum Service will decide whether to grant refugee status, subsidiary protection status, or reject the application.

##### **Step 3 – Appeal**

The asylum seeker has the right to submit an appeal to the Appeals Authority if the application is rejected.

An Appeal Committee examines the appeal and if it is rejected, the asylum seeker may submit an application for revocation (cancellation) to the appropriate court of law.

A fast-track border procedure is applied to applicants subject to the EU-Turkey statement, i.e. applicants who arrived on the Eastern Aegean islands after 20 March 2016, and takes place in the Reception and Identification Centres (RIC). The concept of “safe third country” has been applied for the first time for applicants belonging to a nationality with a recognition rate over 25%, including Syrians.

According to the Asylum Service, since 2013 and by the end of April 2018 there were 155,176 asylum applications. (58,659 in 2017 and 18,625 by the end of April, 2018). Two out of three (67.9%) applications were submitted by males while one out of three applications was put in by Syrians. The positive decisions in substance (refugee status and subsidiary protection) are about 46% from 2017 onwards. 6,052 applications refer to unaccompanied minors (5,452 boys and 600 girls). In total 42,855 applications are pending by end of April 2018.

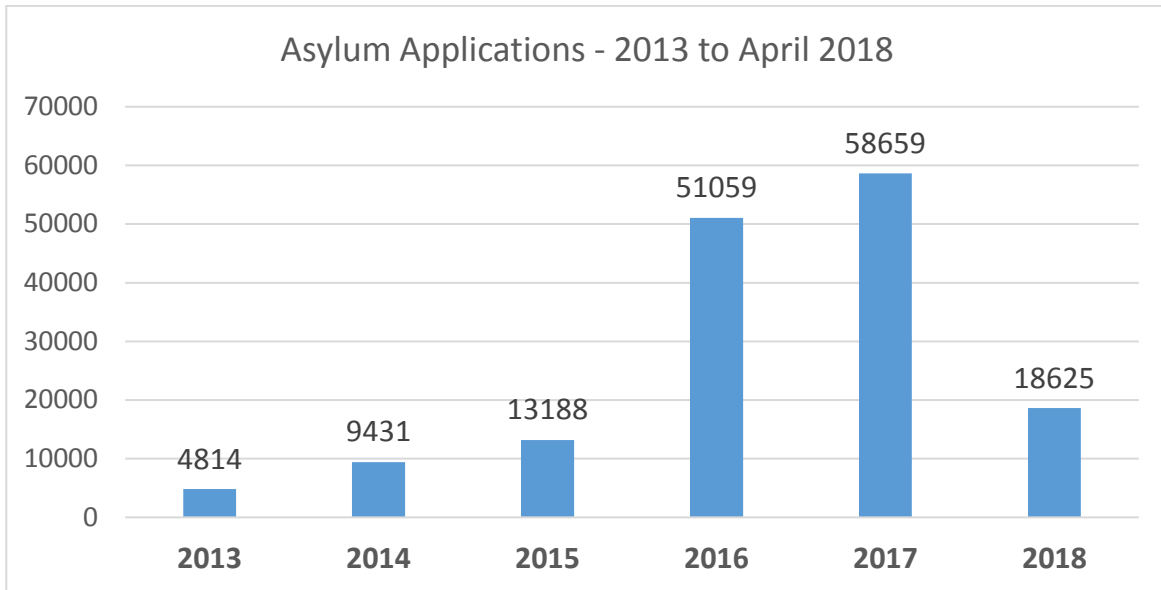


Figure 1: Asylum applications per year – Source: asylum Service ([www.asylum.gov.gr](http://www.asylum.gov.gr)), Statistical Data

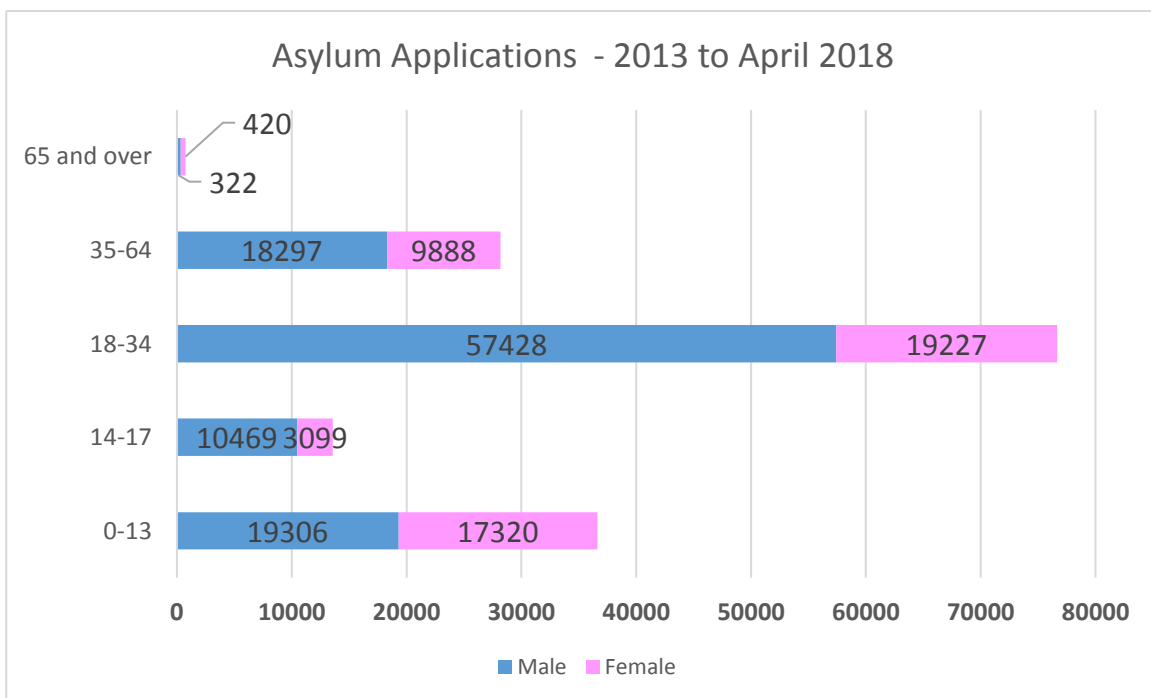


Figure 2: Asylum applications per age group – Source: asylum Service ([www.asylum.gov.gr](http://www.asylum.gov.gr)), Statistical Data

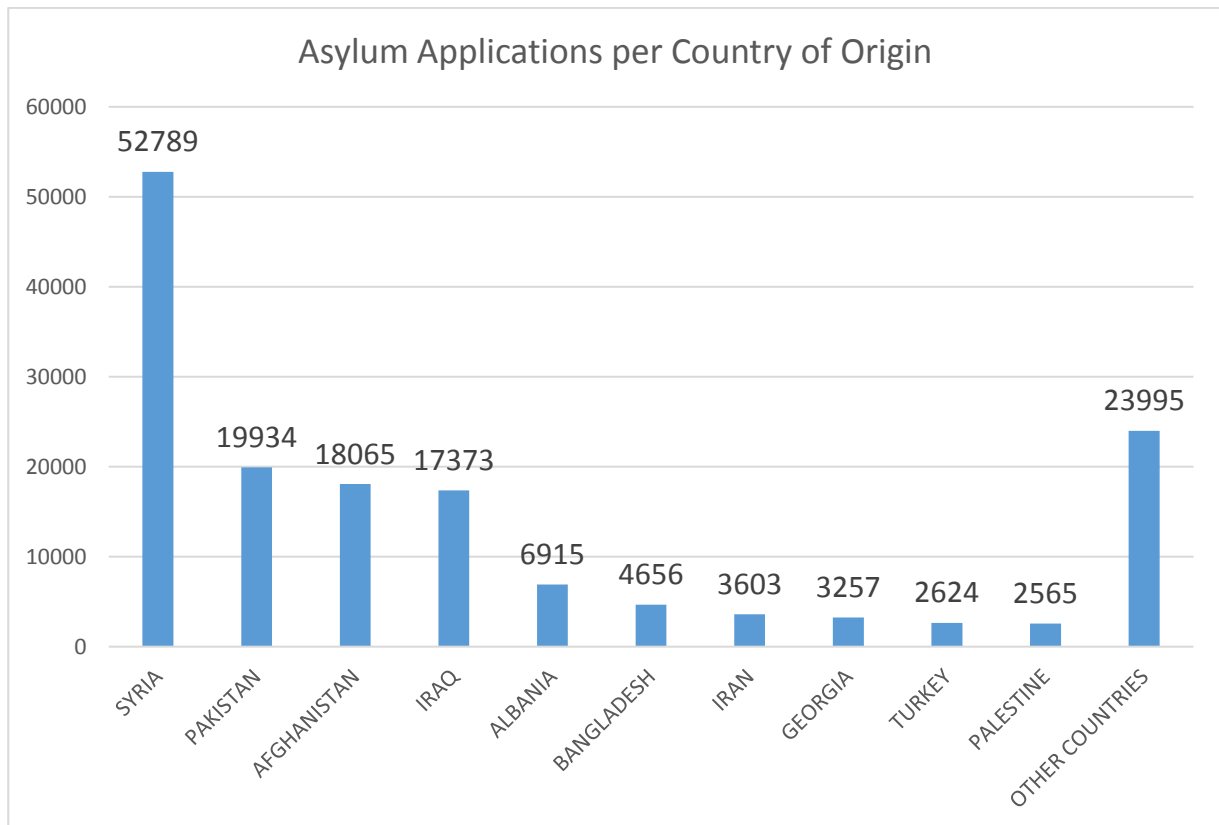


Figure 3: Asylum applications per country of origin – Source: asylum Service ([www.asylum.gov.gr](http://www.asylum.gov.gr)), Statistical Data

### 1.3.2. Accommodation Scheme

Since mid-2015, Greece has faced large-scale arrivals of refugees. The imposition of border restrictions and the subsequent closure of the Western Balkan route in March 2016, effectively trapping about 50,000 third-country nationals in Greece, created an unprecedented burden on the Greek reception system. Since then, the number of reception places, provided by the National Centre for Social Solidarity (EKKA Greece), has increased mainly through temporary accommodation centres (camps) and the UNHCR accommodation scheme.

Despite this increase, destitution and homelessness are still a significant risk to large numbers of applicants. The situation on the islands also remains critical due to overcrowding of reception facilities: “Higher numbers put a strain on already overcrowded reception centres and aggravate tension and frustration amongst asylum-seekers and refugees.” – UNHCR – *Fact Sheet, Aegean Islands, March 2018*.

The purpose of the functioning of accommodation facilities is to provide a stable framework (short-, medium- or long-term) of accommodation able to cover:

- the basic life and social needs of refugees (housing, feeding)
- access to health services
- the provision of basic personal hygiene goods, clothing and footwear
- their pedagogical and learning needs (including learning the Greek language and access to training programmes and skills development)



As of January 2018, in the National Centre for Social Solidarity (EKKA) referral network, a total of 1,530 places were available in 58 reception facilities (9 reception centres, 33 long-term shelters, 16 short-term shelters) mainly run by NGOs. More than a thousand places (1,101) were dedicated to unaccompanied children.

Regarding the temporary accommodation centres (camps), their legal status remains unclear and different administrative authorities are responsible for their operation in practice. The only three facilities officially established on the mainland are: Elaionas, Schisto and Diavata. Conditions in camps are not suitable for long-term accommodation. No data is available on these accommodation places and no official statistics have been published since August 2017. As of 1 August 2017, a total 14,281 persons were accommodated in 32 camps around mainland Greece.

In November 2015, the UNHCR started implementing an accommodation scheme, aiming to provide urban accommodation and cash assistance, dedicated to relocation candidates (“Accommodation for Relocation”) through its own funds. At the end of March 2018, the accommodation scheme was implemented by 17 partners, including 8 NGOs [Praksis, Iliaktida, CRS, Arsis, Solidarity Now, Nostos, Intersos, Tdh] and 9 municipalities. [Athens (ADDMA), Thessaloniki (MUNTHESS), Livadia (KEDHL), Trikala (E-TRIKALA), Karditsa (ANKA), Larissa (DIKEL), Nea Philadelphia - Nea Chalkidona (KEDFX), Tripoli (PARNONAS) and a consortium of municipalities in Crete (Heraklion Development Agency -HDA)].

In total, since November 2015, 47,297 individuals have benefitted from the accommodation scheme. As of the end of April 2018, 21,002 people were accommodated, 3,536 of whom are officially recognised refugees. The children number 48% of this figure. The vast majority of those accommodated are families, and the average family size is four people. One in four residents have at least one of the vulnerabilities that make them eligible for the accommodation scheme.

Through the UNHCR accommodation scheme, accommodation for asylum seekers and refugees has been provided in 21 cities in Greece. Over sixty percent (63%) of the accommodation places are located in Athens, 30% in the rest of the mainland, and 7% on the islands.

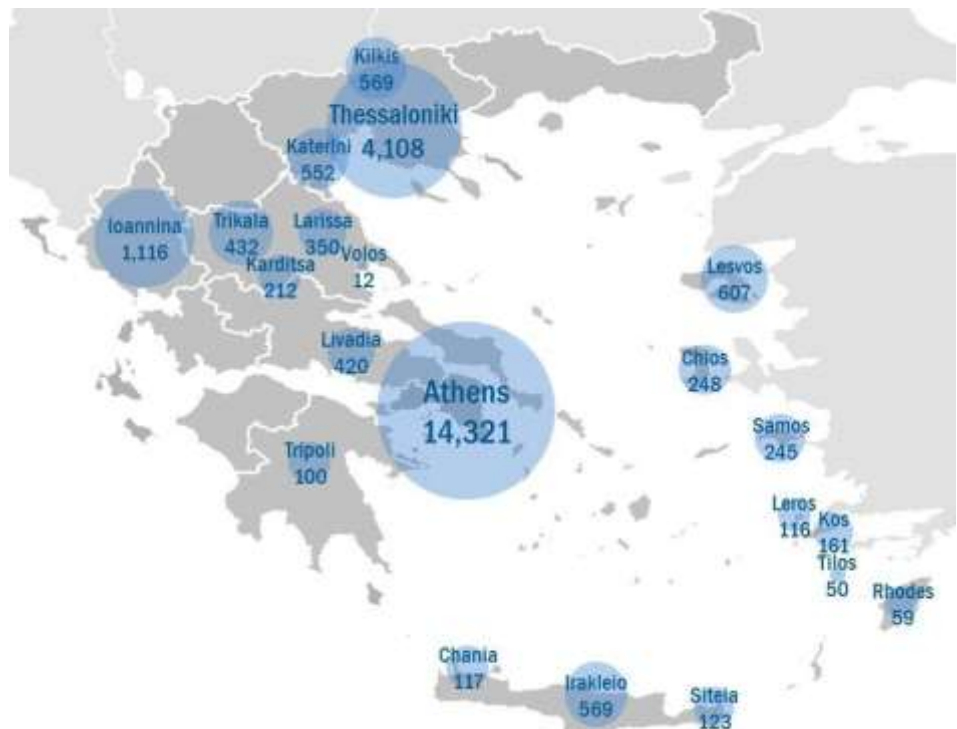


Figure 4: The UNHCR Accommodation Scheme – Source: UNHCR, Greece Accommodation Update, April 2018

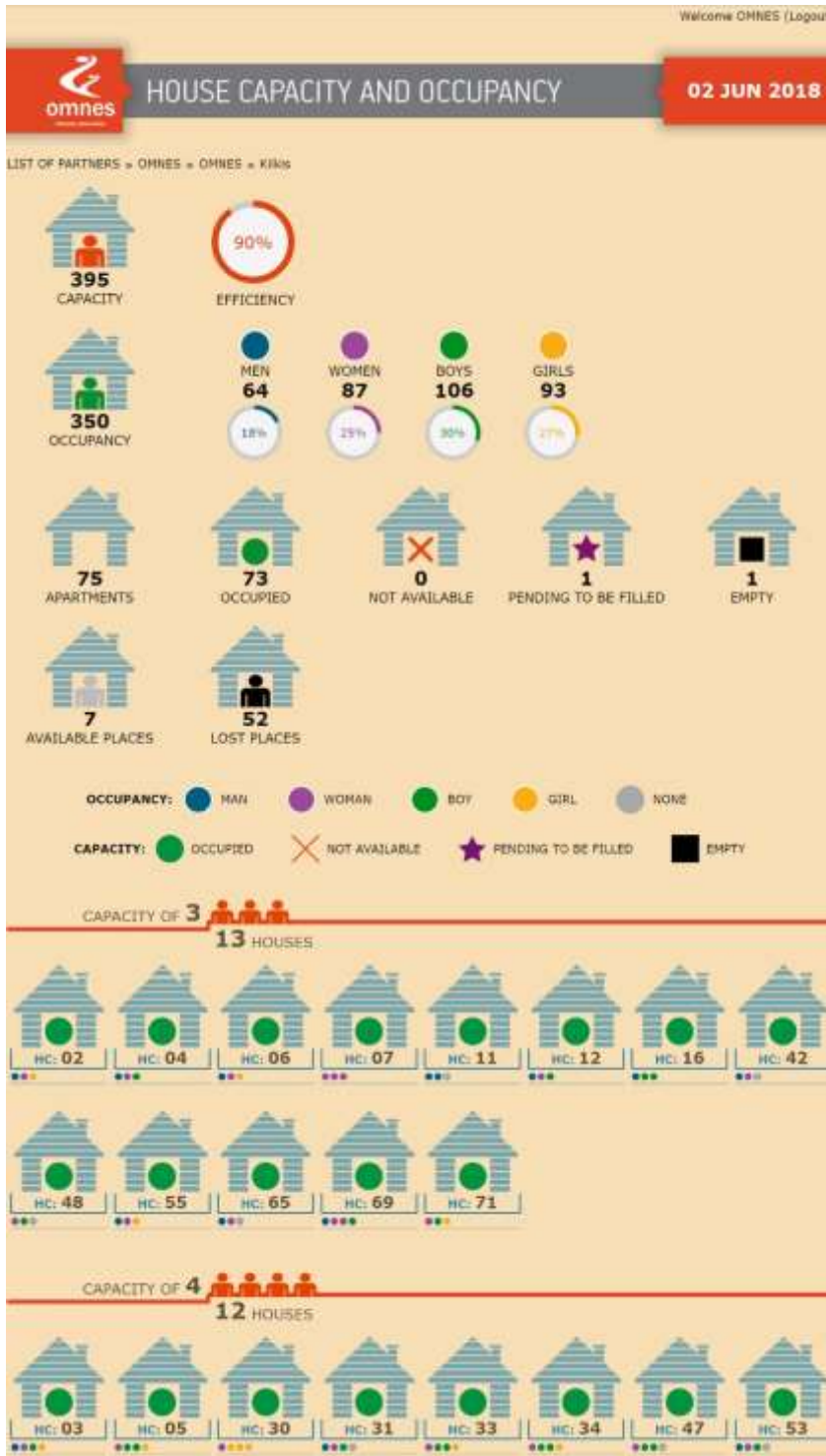


Figure 5: The "House Capacity and Occupancy" website ([www.omnes.vpds.gr](http://www.omnes.vpds.gr)), developed by OMNES, gives up-to-date information regarding the UNHCR Accommodation Scheme.

## 2. State of the Art of Volunteers' work with Asylum seekers and refugees

### 2.1. Main characteristics of volunteer "phenomenon" in Greece

Volunteering in Greece cannot be characterised as a concept widely practiced in the Greek community. Historically, the characteristics that dominated Greek civil society were:

- A strong intervention of the State and the Orthodox Church in the provision of social services
- Weak government support towards non-governmental organisations (NGOs)

Greeks are an individualist society dependent on strong family ties. Greeks have learned to rely mostly on their families and not on their community.

In Greece, voluntary organisations are understood according to the international definition: Non-profit NGOs, in which the voluntary spirit rules, denoting that an NGO is operated mostly by volunteers, unpaid labour. There appears to be a greater level of volunteering in urban areas. By 2010, there were 4,168 registered NGOs. In Greece, culture is the most popular sector where the voluntary organisations carry out activities (37%), while in the social sector, 18% of voluntary organisations are active.

Despite the fact that in the 2010 EU study "Volunteering in the European Union" Greece scored very low between the MSs, the last few years have witnessed an increase in the numbers of volunteers and a new wave of volunteerism has begun to unfold in Greece mainly as a result of the economic and the refugee crisis. After the crisis erupted, leading to a new socio-economic environment, little up-to-date scholarly and/or statistical information has been available on the state of the NGOs in Greece.

Greece does not have a legal framework for volunteering. Volunteering is regulated by or implicit within other existing general law.

#### 2.1.1. Greek branches of international Organisations

Many international organisations and NGOs are active in helping refugees and migrants. The United Nations Refugee High Commission **UNHCR** (<http://www.unhcr.gr>) is active in Greece. The UNHCR's role in Greece focuses on working with the Government, non-governmental and other organisations, volunteer networks and communities to ensure the protection of refugees and asylum seekers arriving in Greece. The UNHCR supports the Government to improve the process through which people can apply for asylum and access rights. Where necessary, the UNHCR helps the Government to fulfill the basic needs of asylum-seekers and refugees. In some cases, the UNHCR provides support when there are gaps relating to shelter, water, sanitation, food, basic household items, health, education, information provision, coordination and site management. The UNHCR does this either directly or by working with partners. The UNHCR's role varies from location to location, depending on the identified needs and partnerships.

Also, the Children's Fund, **UNICEF** (<https://www.unicef.gr>) of the United Nations is represented in Greece and focuses on children and mothers who have fled war and crisis zones.

The **Hellenic Red Cross** is heavily committed to helping refugees. A dedicated help –line (210-51 40 440) provides various services to asylum seekers in twelve languages, including information regarding the asylum procedure, facilitation, support and guidance.

**The International Organisation for Migration** (IOM, <https://greece.iom.int/en>), is an intergovernmental organisation that provides services and advice concerning migration to governments and migrants, including internally displaced persons, refugees, and migrant workers.

The organisation **Doctors of the World** / Giatroi tou Kosmou, ([www.mdmgreece.gr](http://www.mdmgreece.gr)) is particularly active in the health sector and maintains inter alia, an "open practice" for migrants, refugees and the socially disadvantaged, a homeless shelter, medical care and a mobile dental office. Centres for asylum seekers can be found in Athens, Thessaloniki, Perama, Chania Crete and Kavala. The organisation MSF Greece / **Médecins Sans Frontières** / Γιατροί Χωρίς Σύνορα (<http://www.msf.org/greece>) is also involved in health care.

The **SOS Children's Villages** ([www.sos-villages.gr](http://www.sos-villages.gr)) have their own organisation in Greece and help, in particular, unaccompanied minors.

**ActionAid Hellas** ([www.actionaid.gr](http://www.actionaid.gr)) today implements a programme addressing refugee women in the area of Athens. During the last few years of the refugee crisis, Actionaid Hellas has provided psychological support to refugees as well as material support and guidance in their languages. Actionaid was present initially in Lesbos and later on, in the refugee camps of Schisto and Skaramagas.

The **International Rescue Committee** (IRC, [www.rescue.org](http://www.rescue.org)), provides refugees in Greece—whether they are on the move, in camps, or living in urban settings—with credible, up-to-date information about available services, legal rights, and options for asylum, relocation and family reunification. The IRC has created Safe Zones for unaccompanied and separated children in two refugee camps on the Greek mainland, and provides much-needed water, sanitation and hygiene at two refugee sites in Greece: Eleonas, just outside Athens, and Kara Tepe in Lesbos.

The **Danish Refugee Council (DRC)** started operating in Lesbos and Athens in November 2015.

### 2.1.2. Greek Organisations

The Greek civil society has developed organisations and initiatives strongly committed to helping refugees and migrants.

**ARSIS** (Association for the Social Support of Youth, <http://arsis.gr>) is an organisation founded in 1992 for the rights of children and adolescents. It cares especially for unaccompanied minors.

**The Greek Council for Refugees** (<http://www.gcr.gr>) focuses its work on full support for refugees and asylum applicants and provides, inter alia, a social and legal advice. The Greek Forum of Migrants (<http://www.migrant.gr/>) focuses on giving migrants and refugees a forum to help themselves and to get into contact with each other.

The **Greek Forum of Refugees** (GFR, [www.refugees.gr/](http://www.refugees.gr/)) is a multinational network. The founding members are: The Afghan Migrants & Refugees Community in Greece (AMRCG), the Association of Sudanese Refugees in Greece (ASRG), the Society of Somalia in Greece (SSG) and the Greek Forum of Migrants (GFM). Members of GFR can be any groups of refugees, organised in a formal or informal way.

The GFR's main goal is to create a viable network that will unite all refugees living in Greece through a joint course of action. The GFR aims to provide assistance to refugees during the asylum procedure, to protect their rights and help their integration into the Greek society.

The organisation **Kivotos tou Kosmou** (Ark of the World) supports children of different nationalities from socially disadvantaged families by providing them with food, child-care, afternoon courses and other measures for social inclusion.

The **Orange House** is run by the NGO ZAATAR (<http://zaatarngo.org/>) and offers a House for refugees in Athens which has medical, psychosocial and education assistance as well as a mentoring programme for unaccompanied minors. It also offers shelter and assistance to refugees and Legal Aid in cooperation with NGO PRAKSIS.

**Organisation Earth** (<http://www.organisationearth.org>) was founded in 2010 to raise awareness for the environment. Since May 2016 the sub-division Earth Refugee has existed, which is especially engaged in the camps in Sounio (Lavrio) and Skaramangas. They are working on different projects and always support volunteers to find a way to help.

The **Greek Association of Paraplegic Persons** (wheelchair users) PASPA supports refugees e.g. who have lost a leg in a war situation and have to use a wheelchair or a prosthesis, and possibly also their families, by offering housing, nutrition, medical care and legal advice. The organisation has branches in Thessaloniki, Patras, Argos and Lamia.

The organisation **PRAKSIS** (<http://www.praksis.gr/>) fights poverty and exclusion; it reaches out to the poor, homeless, uninsured, migrants of any form (refugees, asylum-seekers, unaccompanied minors, victims of trafficking and forced prostitution). It provides counselling, education and support for people at risk of social exclusion.

**Solidarity Now** (<http://www.solidaritynow.org>) advocates for the rights of people at risk of social exclusion such as Roma, but also refugees and migrants, and provides food aid, accommodation and medical care. The organisation functions as a network for various help organisations and has operated a Solidarity Centre in Athens since December 2014, and in Thessaloniki since January 2014. Special programmes (Shelter, PSS, medical, legal and social aid) have been offered since February 2017 with the EU and UNHCR funds for LGBTQ refugees "Safe Refugee".

**OMNES** ([www.omnes.gr](http://www.omnes.gr)), an association formed by "Front-line" volunteers in Kilikis, Northern Greece. Those volunteers, active for the last three years, were present on the Idomeni border aiding the passing people with food, water, clothing and medical care. After the border closure in August 2015 and the definite border closure in February 2016, the group was called by the local authorities to help in Mazaraki refugee camp. Later on, with donations mainly from NGOs from Sweden, the UK and Spain they managed to host 100s of refugees by paying rent, electricity and water bills. Today, OMNES implement the UNHCR accommodation programme in the Kilikis area.

The **Emergency Response Centre International (ERCI)** ([www. http://ercintl.org/](http://ercintl.org/)), a group of 200+ volunteers, rescuers and lifeguards, that has been operating on the island of Lesbos since 2015 assisting with the large flow of incoming refugees by providing Search and Rescue operations both offshore and ashore, helping more than 45,000 refugees reach safety to date, preventing many casualties in the

Aegean's perilous waters. The ERCI implements two programmes, ERCI SAR (Search and Rescue) and ERCI EDU, a non-traditional educational project that aims to support youth in refugee camps through an innovative curriculum that provides them with the necessary life skills, incentives and language learning to prepare them for their next transition in life and social integration.

**Lighthouse Relief** (<https://www.lighthouse relief.org/>) was founded in 2015 in Lesbos. It is a team of skilled volunteers that provides immediate humanitarian relief for those landing on the northern shore of the island, as well as longer-term programming for young people and children in Ritsona refugee camp in mainland Greece.

The **Heraklion Initiative for the Refugees**, a non-profit association, has been active in Crete since August 2015. Initially, they were collecting clothing and other essentials for the refugees arriving in the Eastern Aegean Islands. They keep contact with the Arab-speaking community of Heraklion, by organising Greek language lessons and informative awareness and cultural events.

The **Social Support Centre for migrants in Chania** (<http://www.stekichania.gr>) is a community based centre established by Greeks and migrant which operates on voluntary basis and aims at teaching Greek to migrants, but also proposes classes in other languages such as Arabic, Turkish, Spanish, English and Russian. A similar initiative, the **Sunday School for migrants in Athens** (<https://www.ksm.gr/>) started by migrant and Greek volunteers to teach the Greek language to migrant workers and refugees. The volunteers are mostly teachers and students.

The **Medical Centre of Social Solidarity** (<http://www.ethiatreio.com>) and the **Social Solidarity Network** (<https://www.koinoniaher.gr>) in Rethymnon and Heraklion Crete respectively are two initiatives established by volunteers doctors, pharmacists and nurses. They provide free medical services to patients who do not have health insurance.

### 2.1.3. Foreign Organisations

**A Drop in the Ocean** (<https://www.drapenihavet.no/en/home/>) is a Norwegian organisation founded in Lesbos in August 2015 when thousands of refugees were arriving on the island. A Drop in the Ocean aims to provide immediate and direct aid to refugees. Their main focus is to help children and their mothers upon arrival in Europe by coordinating volunteers and by collecting and distributing necessary equipment. Since 2015, they have coordinated more than 4,000 aid workers in Greece.

**Humanitarian Support Agency** (HAS, <http://humanitarian-support-agency.org/>) is a Spanish volunteer coordination, providing professional humanitarian relief to asylum seekers and migrants in Greece. They serve at Kara Tepe site in Lesbos, providing vital support through the provision and distribution of hot drinks, clothing with other items, and education and general camp support.

**Humanity Crew** (<https://www.humanitycrew.org/>) is an international aid organisation specialising in the provision of psychological aid to refugees and people in crisis. A group of psychiatrists, psychologists and mental health professionals from the Galilee who travelled to Greece in November 2015 in response to the Syrian refugee crisis. Humanity Crew provides Psychological First Aid (PFA) that is given immediately upon arrival, and a second more thorough intervention at a later stage in the camp. They teamed up with **ProActiva Open Arms** a Spanish organisation of lifeguards, who operate rescue boats in the Aegean Sea (<https://www.proactivaopenarms.org/en>).

**CK Team** is an independent small group of volunteers based in Lesvos. In November 2015, they were supplying refugees with life-jackets ensuring a safe crossing from Turkey to Greece.

#### 2.1.4. Church Organisations

**APOSTOLI** ([www.mkoapostoli.gr](http://www.mkoapostoli.gr)) was founded in 2010 and is the major charity, welfare and humanitarian aid agency of the Archdiocese of Athens (Church of Greece). “Apostoli” offers charity, welfare, emergency relief and development assistance and programmes to all those in need, without any discrimination, whatsoever.

**Caritas Hellas** ([www.caritas.gr](http://www.caritas.gr)) is a registered charitable association, Non-Profit Organisation, institute of the Catholic Church in Greece, member of Caritas Internationalis and Caritas Europa. Caritas Hellas offers charity, essentials, development assistance, providing social services, such as consulting, moral and psychological support, financial and in kind help, offering volunteer activities and implementing programmes against poverty and social exclusion especially concerning vulnerable groups of the population.

## 2.2. The role of volunteers in organisation hosting/working with refugees and asylum seekers

Volunteers have always made a significant contribution to migrant integration by developing migrants’ local skills and personal networks, as well as by filling gaps in state services. High numbers of volunteers were seen in times of large humanitarian arrivals in the Eastern Aegean Islands. As the interviews with key actors and volunteers suggest, the role of volunteers in the Aegean islands varied from “search and rescue” activities to provision of food and clothing, psychological and medical support, legal support and interpreting services.

All around Greece, there are many volunteer-based initiatives, often supported by local authorities that provide informal learning or leisure activities between non-migrant organisers and groups of (mostly) newcomer adults or children. Most learning activities are unidirectional, with non-migrants teaching migrants. Learning is mostly focused on informal or non-formal learning of Greek, Arabic and the English language and general socio-cultural education.

Large scale organisations (e.g. the Red Cross) follow established rules in recruiting and training the volunteers as well as providing psychological support to their volunteers. Smaller local grassroots organisations have no such programmes.

## 3. Volunteers’ needs

For the purpose of this report, various organisations and volunteers were contacted around Greece. When possible, face-to-face meeting were arranged. Data was also gathered through Skype or phone interviews. The following analysis is based on personal interviews and group discussions with key actors and volunteers working with refugees and asylum seekers. For a list of participating Organisations and Volunteers, see Annex I.

### 3.1. Who are they? Knowing and analysing volunteers' motivations, needs, attitudes, skills, expectations and beliefs

All age groups are represented in volunteering in refugee sectors but two age groups, young adults aged 25 to 30 and seniors aged 60+, are mostly involved. An explanation for this is that young adults who are facing the economic crisis and unemployment are more aware of the problem. It is reported that especially for young volunteers working with international organisations, using this information on their CVs is a strong motivation for them. Senior adults, retired from their jobs, have more free time to offer.

"I get satisfaction when I see a smile..."

In general, volunteers define their role as serving other people and working for a better world. One volunteer mentioned: *"Working as a volunteer is a life changing experience. I face the reality and get the opportunity to understand other people's issues"* while another noted: *"I feel that I'm doing something small but really important"*. At the end of a hard day, *"pride and appreciation"* are the feelings of another volunteer.

The duties of volunteers depend on the time / place they are called to serve. On the frontline (the Aegean Islands) there are volunteers working in "find and rescue" teams (rescuers, lifeguards), as well as those that provide psychological support and first aid. A common duty, not requiring any special skills, of volunteers working in hotspots is the provision of food and clothing to refugees. Medical and psychological support, as well as interpreting services, are also provided in hotspots. In mainland Greece, in places where various accommodation schemes are implemented, the volunteers' role is different. Volunteers help the migrants and refugees to establish their life in their new home by providing them with legal support and information on the asylum procedure, preparing the houses for them (e.g. installing electrical equipment), organising language lessons and cultural events. Volunteers in mainland Greece also provide psychological and medical support.

The time that the volunteers spend in their activities varies from a couple of hours per week to few hours per day. Unemployed young adults and senior citizens seem to have more time available for volunteering.

Intercultural competencies, empathy, patience and tolerance are among the skills and attitudes volunteers must have. In addition, "being mentally prepared" is important especially for volunteers on the frontline. For specific duties, well-trained volunteers are required (rescuers, doctors, psychologists, lawyers, interpreters, educators) but for all duties in general *"willing to help under any circumstances"* is an important factor for volunteering. Cases were reported where untrained volunteers were working in pairs with trained ones (e.g. spending time with children while their parents had language lessons). In another case, a trained doctor was helping in other duties (providing clothing in Piraeus port where thousands of refugees were based in March 2016).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, only volunteers, working for large-scale international organisations, have some sort of official training /certificate regarding their duties. The need of training was mentioned by volunteers in order to improve their intercultural competencies. Knowing the legal framework of the country is also important in order to guide volunteers to where legal support and advice is available. As was reported, there are many undocumented migrants in Greece since either they do not have access to legal support or, in some cases, they have been deceived by lawyers.



The psychological support of volunteers is also important as mentioned by a psychiatrist / psychoanalyst who provided psychological support to refugees as well as to volunteers working in a hotspot in the Aegean Islands: “*Volunteers that serve in the frontline suffer from post-traumatic shock*”, she mentioned.

No major issues were reported by volunteers in relation to their cooperation with other volunteers or paid staff inside their organisations. In some cases, the asylum seekers seem to trust them more than they trust the authorities. As volunteers report the refugees are more open with the volunteers than “*the men in uniform*”.

Conflict can occur between authorities / NGOs and individual activists. Sometimes, especially in emergencies like those faced in the Aegean Islands in times of a large influx of refugees, for example, in Idomeni (border of North Greece) and in Piraeus port, hundreds of individuals activists ran to help. The majority of them has no prior experience in humanitarian help. Some of them wanted to do it their own way and this caused tension among the volunteers or between the volunteers and the authorities.

One key point that was mentioned in many of the interviews with the key actors and volunteers is the absence of a clear legal and regulatory framework regarding volunteering (especially for individual volunteers) in Greece. Volunteers as well as their organisations are not covered by the law in case something goes wrong while they are serving refugees. There were reported cases where volunteers faced charges from the authorities for human trafficking while they were saving lives in Eastern Aegean Sea.

### **3.2. What are the key factor for successful integration? And what are the critical points?**

As reported by volunteers, engaging refugees as volunteers in the process as well as migrants who have already settled in Greece is a key factor for successful integration. Giving active roles to refugees (instead of “waiting to be helped”) can help to process things faster. Many of the refugees have skills and competences strongly needed especially in emergencies. Migrants who have settled in Greece can help with the cultural integration of refugees in their new environment. The Arab-speaking communities around Greece can offer a great deal of help in organising language lessons, cultural events, as well as interpreting services. Integration initiatives, namely language classes or cultural events seem to be equally shared between Greek citizens and migrants. There are cases where initiatives have started from migrants such as the Greek Forum of Refugees (GFR) with Greek supporters following them.

Even if in many initiatives (e.g. Coordination for Refugees – Heraklion) lawyers have an active role, more legal support and guidance for the refugees is needed, in combination with interpreter services. Refugees need legal advice not only while they apply for asylum but also at a later stage when they are seeking jobs, medical care, or trying to start their own business. The recruitment of more lawyers as well as interpreters as volunteers is essential.

## **4. Conclusion and considerations/suggestions**

In conclusion, in order to cope with the Refugee crisis, the Greek state has established a migration management system, through the operation of the Asylum Service, the establishment of Reception and

Identification Centres and the adaptation of Greek legislation to the EU Directive on the return of irregular migrants. Since the mid-2015, Greece has faced large-scale arrivals of refugees and the imposition of border restrictions and the subsequent closure of the Western Balkan route in March 2016, resulted in trapping about 50,000 third-country nationals in Greece. Since then, the number of reception places, provided by the National Centre for Social Solidarity (EKKA Greece) has increased, mainly through temporary accommodation centres (camps) and the UNHCR accommodation scheme.

Volunteers play an all-essential role in helping refugees upon their arrival at the Reception and Identification Centres in the Eastern Aegean Islands, in refugee camps all around mainland Greece, as well as in urban areas where the accommodation schemes have been implemented. Volunteers carry out all sort of activities varying from medical/ psychological support to providing clothing and language lessons to refugees.

As has been evidenced in the previous chapters, an online training course providing information on the legal framework, psychological support, as well as intercultural competence could be of great help to volunteers' needs in their effort to service the asylum seekers and to better help them to integrate into Greek society.

Finally, a legal and regulatory framework regarding volunteering should be put in place in Greece.

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## Annex I

### List of Interviews with key actors / volunteers

1. CK, Director of the Regional Asylum Office (Crete) | Skype
2. DK, Heraklion Development Agency (HDA), implements the UNHCR accommodation scheme in Crete | f2f
3. SK, Protection Manager at ActionAid Greece | Phone interview
4. SE, EU Aid Volunteers, ActionAidGreece | Phone interview
5. OA, Volunteer Coordinator at Hellenic Red Cross | Phone interview
6. CG, Volunteer psychiatrist / psychoanalyst, Doctors of the World | Phone interview

### List of group discussions with volunteers

1. A Skype discussion with 6 members (SK, AP, Apostolos, CM, MM, I) of OMNES (NGO based in Kilkis, Northern Greece). All served as volunteers in Idomeni camp. OMNES implements the UNHCR accommodation scheme in Kilkis.
2. A f2f discussion with two volunteers (ET, EC) members of the Heraklion Initiative for Refugees and Immigrants and MD, volunteer ophthalmologist in the Social Solidarity Network of Heraklion.