

Report

Humanitarian assistance and social protection responses to the forcibly displaced in Greece

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Building the Evidence on Forced Displacement

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About this publication

The aim of the Social Protection Responses to Forced Displacement programme is to better understand effective mechanisms for linking social protection programmes and humanitarian assistance. By providing clearer guidance about when, how and why different linkages might be considered, the project will develop the theory, evidence base and operational guidance on how social protection systems and humanitarian systems can work together to meet the needs of those affected by displacement crises, including not only the displaced but vulnerable households in their host communities as well. The research is grounded in three country contexts with a total of six study sites that present different contexts of displacement and humanitarian response: Greece (Athens and Ioannina), Colombia (Bogotá and Cúcuta) and Cameroon (far north and east). The project is led by ODI in close collaboration with the Centre for Applied Social Sciences Research and Training (CASS-RT) in Cameroon, the School of Government at the University of Los Andes in Colombia and the National Centre for Social Research (EKKE) in Greece.

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Acronyms/Glossary

AFM	tax registration number
AMIF	Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund
AMKA	social insurance number
EKKA	National Centre for Social Solidarity
ESI	Emergency Support Instrument
ESTIA	Emergency Support to Integration and Accommodation
GDP	gross domestic product
HELIOS	Hellenic Integration Support for Beneficiaries of International Protection
ISF	Internal Security Fund
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPA	International Protection Act
KEM	Migrant Information Centre
MGI	Minimum Guaranteed Income
NGO	non-governmental organisation
OPEKA	Organisation for Welfare Benefits and Social Solidarity
PAAYPA	Provisional Insurance and Healthcare Number for Foreigners
RIC	Reception and Identification Centre
SSI	Social Solidarity Income
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Key Messages

1. Greece's two systems of social assistance for the displaced – the humanitarian assistance they receive immediately and the social protection they are eligible for once recognised as refugees – are poorly integrated. Humanitarian assistance is funded by the European Union and was developed as distinct from the national social protection system.
2. Administered until 2021 by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and now run by the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, humanitarian assistance has addressed the emergency needs of the displaced only to the level of their most basic survival requirements, and sometimes not even those.
3. A coverage gap exists when moving from one system to the other. Asylum seekers stop receiving financial assistance as soon as they are recognised as refugees and lose access to accommodation within a month of being granted asylum, with many remaining without legal documents for several months.
4. Social protection is subject to strict eligibility criteria and complicated administrative requirements, making access difficult for recognised refugees. This leaves them in a worse position than asylum seekers and facing a high risk of social exclusion.
5. No matter how social assistance to the displaced population is organised – whether parallel, aligned or fully integrated into the national social protection system – the explicit or implicit political choices that shape social assistance determine outcomes. Within this context, it is premature to suggest a full integration of the social assistance systems in Greece without an in-depth review of integration and social inclusion policies.

Executive Summary

In 2015–2016, approximately 1.2 million refugees and asylum seekers from war-torn and poverty-stricken countries in Asia travelled through Turkey to Greece and continued via the western Balkan route to other European countries. In March 2016, that movement came to a halt, which left approximately 57,000 people stranded in Greece. Already facing the effects of a severe economic crisis, the Greek government requested assistance to cope with the unprecedented situation. Assistance has been delivered since 2015 predominantly via EU funds and institutions, with UNHCR playing until 2021 a pivotal role in coordinating all the actors involved and in managing the newly established humanitarian assistance mechanism.

Social protection and humanitarian assistance for displaced populations

From the outset, humanitarian assistance in Greece was developed as a system of support distinct from the national social protection system. Humanitarian assistance is for asylum seekers, while social protection is for the host population and third-country nationals with a valid residence permit and – with certain limitations – those with refugee status.

The social protection system is the sole responsibility of the Greek state and is administered and funded by it. The main precondition is legal and permanent residence in the country.

On the other hand, humanitarian assistance is funded by the EU but implemented by Greece's

Ministry of Migration and Asylum. Humanitarian assistance consists of cash assistance and accommodation. Until 2021,¹ this Emergency Support to Integration and Accommodation (ESTIA) was administered by the UNHCR with the assistance of national and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

All asylum seekers registered at Reception and Identification Centres (RICs) are eligible for cash and accommodation assistance. Cash transfer begins one month after the applicant's registration and is terminated one month after their asylum application is processed. The value of cash assistance cannot exceed that of the Minimum Guaranteed Income (MGI) national cash transfer, and ranges between €75 for an individual in catered camps and €420 for a family of four or more in non-catered camps. **Accommodation assistance** is provided in apartments in 15 cities and three islands in Greece. It is also provided in open reception facilities, in RICs and in shelters cooperating with the ministry.

Recognised refugees stop receiving humanitarian assistance once their asylum application is successful, and in principle, become eligible to apply for a number of state benefits, such as the MGI, unemployment benefits, rent allowance, child and disability benefits, etc. **The only (EU-sponsored) option for accommodation for beneficiaries of international protection is the Hellenic Integration Support for Beneficiaries of International Protection (HELIOS) programme,** implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). HELIOS beneficiaries are

¹ January 2021 for the housing component and September/October 2021 for cash assistance.

offered support to find an apartment and enter into a lease agreement in their name directly with the apartment owner. In addition, HELIOS beneficiaries are also assisted with integration courses and employability support.

Barriers to accessing humanitarian assistance and social protection

Under the scope of ODI's 'Social Protection Responses to Forced Displacement' programme and to investigate the impact of the humanitarian responses and the social protection for asylum seekers and refugees, a quantitative survey was conducted in 2021 with 1,500 refugees, asylum seekers, and members of the host population. In addition, 96 in-depth interviews were conducted with key informants, displaced persons and recipients of social benefits from the host population. Research was carried out in Athens and in Ioannina, the capital of the Epirus region in north-western Greece. **Findings from our research have identified a number of barriers to assistance for both asylum seekers and refugees.**

Asylum seekers and recognised refugees have highlighted the **inefficiency of Greek public service regarding the asylum process**, in particular the long delays in getting interviews, poor and fragmentary communication with the authorities and difficulties in accessing the registration system and inquiring about the progress of a case. Issues related to bureaucracy, the complexity of the procedures, lack of information about the prerequisites and the supporting documents that need to be collected were noted. In a number of cases, applicants realised that they were granted refugee status only because they stopped receiving benefits. The above problems were compounded during the COVID lockdowns.

Lack of legal support and advice on applications or appeals were also raised as issues of concern. Asylum seekers who were not registered through a RIC and were self-accommodated noted a significant lack of guidance and reliable information regarding access to cash assistance and related services.

A key issue raised by refugees was the very brief transition period from the humanitarian assistance system to the national social protection system. Applicants for international protection stop receiving financial assistance as soon as they receive a positive decision on their asylum application and lose access to accommodation within a month of being granted asylum. This arrangement leaves this population in an extremely vulnerable position, a point raised by several of our interviewees. There is also a long waiting period (from six months to a year) for recognised refugees to receive their legal documents from the moment they stop receiving benefits, which results in their poverty and marginalisation.

Benefits and drawbacks of the current approach

The benefits and drawbacks of the current approach that are highlighted by the displaced span a broad range of issues, but most especially basic needs and welfare, economic agency and social cohesion.

As such, **both refugees and asylum seekers regard the assistance they receive (either cash or in-kind) as very important and indispensable to their well-being and in covering their basic needs.** Yet, well-being is also dependent on the type of benefits that individuals receive. While asylum seekers receive

both cash assistance and accommodation through the humanitarian assistance system, recognised refugees are excluded from these provisions.

One of the key findings is that few refugees are aware of the national social protection benefits they are eligible to and have successfully overcome the bureaucratic and other obstacles to accessing the social protection system.

The way the two systems are implemented produce **significant negative emotional outcomes for both refugees and asylum seekers**. Survey respondents believe they have lost control of their fate and experience uncertainty about their future: more than half of refugees (56%) felt fairly often or very often that they were unable to control the important things in their life, compared to 45% of asylum seekers. Additionally, their majority (seven out of ten refugees and six out of ten asylum seekers) had felt nervous and stressed ‘very often’ or ‘fairly often’ over the previous month. Given their living conditions, their anxiety, their sense of lack of control over their lives and uncertainty about their future, both asylum seekers and refugees perceive their own well-being as extremely low. When asked ‘how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days’ on a 10-point scale, an alarming share of refugees (51%) and asylum seekers (41%) answered ‘completely dissatisfied’.

Overall, the way the two systems of humanitarian assistance and social protection are implemented has a negative impact on the well-being of the people it is supposed to assist. Based on the research findings, the humanitarian assistance system leads to the marginalisation and ghettoisation of asylum seekers in accommodation structures and camps, often in poor living conditions at a significant distance from the nearest city. On the other hand,

the de facto exclusion of recognised refugees from the national social protection system leads to the deepening of poverty and social exclusion of those who move from the status of ‘asylum seeker’ to that of ‘recognised refugee’.

Regarding their economic agency, both asylum seekers and recognised refugees highlighted their dire financial situation, with the latter being in an even worse situation than the former. The majority of asylum seekers consider the amount of cash assistance as inadequate to cover their basic needs and as a result, often seek extra sources of income. As job opportunities are extremely limited for the displaced (as indicated by the survey findings, only 4% of the displaced population surveyed are employed), most have to borrow money to cover their needs.

As far as **social cohesion** is concerned, research findings indicate that **interaction between the host population and the displaced community (refugees and asylum seekers) remains limited**. Indicatively, more than 7 out of 10 of the host population say that they never interact with members of the displaced community. Similarly, 40% of refugees report that they never interact with members of the host community. Those who live in the camps report extremely limited interaction with the host population, indicating the negative impact that accommodation in the camps as opposed to in city apartments has on the integration of this population.

Issues of antagonism between the two communities also emerged from our empirical research since a significant part of the host population feels resentment towards the displaced, especially as regards perceived competition for public services or social resources. Moreover, while a significant part (76%) of the host population agrees or strongly

agrees that the vulnerable from the displaced community should receive support, at the same time 55% are convinced that vulnerable from the displaced community receive more support than vulnerable Greeks.

Outcomes of the current approach

Based on the empirical findings of our research, the humanitarian assistance and social protection responses to the forcibly displaced in Greece have had mixed outcomes.

On one hand, the current system has succeeded, since 2015–2016, in addressing the emergency needs of the displaced population, especially during the first years of the refugee crisis. The active involvement of the UNHCR and of other international, European and national organisations greatly contributed to the smooth roll-out of humanitarian assistance and they have helped balance conflicting interests. Yet, on the other hand, the way the humanitarian assistance is organised encourages the ‘institutionalisation’ of asylum seekers, while from a needs’ perspective, it falls short of addressing anything more than the most basic survival requirements of asylum seekers, and sometimes not even those.

Overall, by providing humanitarian assistance that barely covers basic needs, by condemning recognised refugees to a limbo situation for months until their legal documents are issued, and by effectively excluding them from access to the national social protection system, the current systems of assistance do little to improve the well-being of the people they are supposed to help. **The underlying reasons for this outcome relate less to issues of alignment or integration between social protection and humanitarian assistance, and more to implicit or explicit policy choices.**

Policy implications and recommendations

Several policy recommendations are made here that aim to better streamline the two systems and better assist the displaced populations.

Key among them are adequate transition mechanisms that prepare beneficiaries of international protection for their future self-reliance. For the transition period until recognised refugees receive all their legal documents, a ‘bridge’ programme is required to cover the existing gap. **The extension of the HELIOS programme to all recognised refugees, for a period of up to 12 months, could serve this purpose.**

In addition, to ensure a minimum standard of protection and the non-violation of basic human rights of asylum seekers, it would be useful to **establish an over-arching advisory committee, consisting of independent stakeholders** (including, for example, the UNHCR, the Greek Ombudsman and the Greek National Commission for Human Rights), **to monitor and evaluate the implementation of humanitarian assistance** on the ground. Otherwise, the full take-over by the state of the management of humanitarian assistance may lead to a deterioration of the living conditions of asylum seekers.

Finally, another issue that needs to be urgently addressed by the authorities to avoid a surge in social exclusion is the problem of homeless recognised refugees. Their number is expected to rise dramatically, as all asylum seekers with a positive answer to their application are required to vacate their apartments within 30 days. **An adequate period should be provided for recognised refugees to vacate their ESTIA accommodation.**

Summarising, from an EU country perspective, concrete improvements in the assistance provided to the displaced predominantly depend on the country's migration and social inclusion policies, rather than on the nature of the linkages between assistance systems. **No matter how**

assistance to the displaced population is organised, whether parallel, aligned or fully integrated into the national social protection system, the explicit or implicit political choices that shape these systems will determine the outcome.

1 Introduction

More than 80 million people are displaced globally in 2020, a figure that has doubled in the last decade (UNHCR, 2021a). Most are displaced on a protracted basis and live alongside host communities in urban or semi-urban areas rather than designated camps for refugees or internally displaced people (IDPs) (IPU and UNHCR, 2017; UNHCR, 2020a; OCHA, 2017).

As a result, ‘care and maintenance’ models of humanitarian assistance based on providing immediate relief to meet emergency needs are poorly suited to displacement situations today. Various initiatives to promote more sustainable and development-oriented solutions to displacement challenges need to be considered, including greater engagement with and strengthening of national social protection systems as a potential crisis response mechanism.²

The potential for humanitarian assistance to link with national social protection systems to meet the needs of both displaced and host communities is an area of growing interest. Yet, there is a knowledge gap on the practical implications

of such linkages and what the impacts might be on different population groups (Peterman et al., 2018). For instance, it is not clear whether and how more integrated social protection provisions affect social cohesion within and between displaced and host communities.

To help address this knowledge gap, ODI was commissioned by the World Bank to lead a two-year project (2020–2022) exploring when and how humanitarian and social protection systems can work together to respond to forced displacement in various contexts. Funded by an FCDO-financed Trust Fund on Forced Displacement, the project has several components, including primary research in three countries across six study sites that represent a range of contexts in terms of income levels, geographies, displacement situations, humanitarian response models and social protection system maturity.

This report presents the findings from the primary research in Greece, which was carried out in the first half of 2021 by researchers at the EKKE research centre, in partnership with ODI.

² For example, see the commitments to increase engagement with social protection systems and promote displaced populations’ access to such systems in the 2016 New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants (UN, 2016); the Grand Bargain emerging from the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit (IASC, 2016), and the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees (UN, 2018).

2 Overview of research and methods

2.1 Research questions

To help identify the optimal approaches for linking social protection and humanitarian assistance in different displacement situations, the research project aims to answer four key questions:

- To what extent and in what ways has humanitarian assistance been linked with social protection in different contexts? (Section 4.2)
- What factors and processes led to the adoption of these approaches? (Section 4.3)
- What have been the benefits and drawbacks of these approaches for different stakeholders, and what is perceived to have driven these impacts? (Section 5)
- What are the insights for linking social protection and humanitarian assistance in different displacement contexts? (Section 6)

These questions were the foundation of the case study research, with emphasis placed on the most pertinent aspects for each case study. To address these questions, each case study also started a preliminary research question to understand provision in their specific context:

- What is the current state of access to social protection and humanitarian assistance for displacement-affected populations in the case study contexts?

The findings on this preliminary question are presented in Section 4.1.

2.2 Methods used and data collected

2.2.1 Brief overview of case study sites

The first study site for the project was Athens, the capital and largest city of Greece. The Athens Urban Area or Greater Athens has a population of 3,090,508 (2011 census). The majority of national and international NGOs assisting migrants, refugees and asylum seekers are based in Athens, as are migrant and refugees' associations and organisations. Over the past three decades, the city has received a large number of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. That was also the case during the recent refugee crisis, as people in need chose to stay in Athens to be close to government services, NGOs and other migrants from their own countries. In May 2020, there were seven accommodation sites operating in the Attica region, housing a total of 8,611 refugees and asylum seekers. These sites were managed by the Reception and Identification Service, the Hellenic Army and/or the Hellenic Navy, with site management support provided by IOM or the Danish Refugee Council (IOM, 2020). In addition, in August 2020 a total of 11,821 refugees and asylum seekers were living in apartments provided via the ESTIA accommodation scheme.

The second study site was Ioannina, the capital and largest city of the Epirus region in north-western Greece, which combines both urban and rural elements. According to the 2011 census, the

city population was 65,574, while the municipality had 112,486 inhabitants. From the beginning of the humanitarian crisis in Greece, the municipality hosted a significant number of refugees and asylum seekers in camps and urban settings, and has demonstrated a commitment to the effective integration of refugees. When Epirus was selected as the second study site in August 2020, there were three main camps operating in the region, managed by the Reception and Identification Service, with site management support provided by the Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund agency from Germany, housing a total of 2,066 refugees and asylum seekers (IOM, 2020). In addition, there were close to 700 refugees and asylum seekers living in apartments in Ioannina through the ESTIA programme.

2.2.2 Quantitative survey

The quantitative research was conducted through two research tools. Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI) was the preferred method for the host population, while the displaced population was interviewed via Tablet Assisted Personal Interviewing (TAPI).

There were six enumerators trained for the telephone interviews with the host population. For the interviews with the displaced population, eight enumerators were trained: four for the Athens Refugee Survey, and four more for the

interviews in Ioannina. The enumerators were native Arabic or Farsi speaking. To ensure access to women refugees and asylum seekers,³ half of the enumerators were women.

A one-day field test took place in Athens and Ioannina⁴ before the survey began. In total, there were 17 pilot interviews for the phone survey, which took place only in Athens because the telephone interview enumerators were the same for both sites. Regarding the displaced population, 16 face-to-face pilot interviews were conducted in Athens and 12 in Ioannina.

Sampling in Athens for the host population used quota sampling using sex (male/female) and social benefit recipient (yes/no) assuming 90 cases per joint-category. Certain regions of Athens with specific socio-economic profile were oversampled to find more recipients. Sampling for the applicants and beneficiaries of international protection in Athens was with Convenient Sampling through contacts provided by stakeholders and enumerators. At the beginning of the sampling procedure, we were trying to fill quotas for sex and assistance recipient/non-recipient. Quota sampling was aborted at the end of the collection period due to time limitations. Regarding sampling for the hosts in Ioannina, we started by considering the same quotas as for Athens. Due to time limitations, we continued using a simple random sampling from the telephone directory. For sampling

3 For the purpose of this survey, the term ‘asylum seeker’ is used interchangeably with the term ‘applicant of international protection’, and the term ‘refugee’ with the term ‘beneficiaries of international protection’, which includes both categories of refugees and those who receive subsidiary protection

4 The original study design was to conduct one of the two surveys in the island of Lesbos; however, the fires that broke out on 8–10 September 2020 destroyed all the accommodation in Moria Reception and Identification Centre (RIC) as well as the adjacent ‘Olive Grove’ area. Alternatives were examined for the other Aegean Islands with RICs, primarily Chios, but due to the lack of alternative sampling populations in those regions and an increasing number of Covid-19 cases at the time, which could potentially lead to a lockdown during our research phase, these options were discarded. The research team decided to conduct the second quantitative survey and qualitative research in Ioannina, a city which combines both urban and rural elements, where the Covid-19 caseload was lighter and the number of accommodation structures for the displaced larger.

refugees in Ioannina, we used Convenient Sampling through contacts provided by stakeholders and enumerators. Data collection for both sites was

carried out from January to May 2021, as illustrated in Table 1. Our sample is broken down further in Table 2.

Table 1 Data collection methods and dates

Region	Method used	Target population	Duration
Attiki (Athens)	Phone survey	Host	11/01/2021–08/03/2021
Epirus (Ioannina)	Phone survey	Host	16/03/2021–29/04/2021
Attiki (Athens)	Face-to-face survey	Applicants and beneficiaries of international protection	11/01/2021–8/5/2021
Epirus (Ioannina)	Face-to-face survey	Applicants and beneficiaries of international protection	31/03/2021–30/04/2021

Table 2 Sample description

		Sample		
		Host	Refugee	Asylum seeker
Sex of the respondent	Male	46.3%	58.0%	54.2%
	Female	53.7%	42.0%	45.8%
Age groups	18–29	7.6%	37.8%	43.8%
	30–49	34.8%	52.2%	52.1%
	50–64	38.2%	9.0%	4.2%
	65+	19.4%	1.0%	0.0%
Highest education level attended	No education	0.1%	46.2%	44.2%
	Early childhood education programme	0.8%	1.6%	4.4%
	Primary education	8.8%	22.1%	19.9%
	Secondary education	43.1%	19.6%	19.4%
	Higher education	47.2%	10.6%	12.0%
Region	Attiki (Athens)	49.9%	58.3%	44.9%
	Epirus (Ioannina)	50.1%	41.7%	55.1%
Recipient vs non-recipient	Non-recipient	55.1%	73.7%	38.0%
	Recipient	44.9%	26.3%	62.0%
Cash / in kind benefit	Cash	98.4%	36.0%	85.1%
	In kind	1.6%	64.0%	14.9%

		Sample		
		Host	Refugee	Asylum seeker
Does respondent have any form of employment	Yes	34.2%	4.2%	4.2%
	No	65.8%	95.8%	95.8%
Interview language	Arab-speaking country (Syrian Arab Republic, Iraq etc)	0.0%	74.4%	26.9%
	Farsi-speaking country (Afghanistan, Iran)	0.0%	25.6%	73.1%
	Greek	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%
		752	312	432

2.2.3 Qualitative research

The research team conducted a total of 96 in-depth interviews with key informants, displaced persons and recipients of social benefits from the host population in two sites (see Table 3). The displaced persons interviewed originated mostly from Afghanistan and Syria, with a few from Iraq. A roughly equal number of men and women, recipients and non-recipients of assistance were interviewed. Though by no means representative, the survey population covers a wide spectrum of lived experiences

and socio-demographic features (the displaced) and of profiles and perspectives (key informants).

The interviews were held between January and June 2021, either face to face or via internet platforms such as Zoom and WhatsApp. Because of the pandemic restrictions, it was not possible to hold any focus group discussions. Hence, more face-to-face interviews were carried out than had originally been planned by the research team.

Table 3 Interviews conducted

	Athens	Ioannina	Total
Displaced population (IDIs)	28	33	61
Key informants (KIIs)	19	11	30
Host population	5	-	5
TOTAL	52	44	96

The interviews were conducted by eight researchers from the National Centre for Social Research,⁵ who were assisted by two Arab-speaking and two Farsi-speaking interpreters.

The majority of the interviews were carried out in the native language of the interviewees, while a few were held in English or Greek. All interviews were recorded with the consent of

⁵ The interviews were carried out by A. Capella, I. Gallou, E. Georgakakou, P. Gerakopoulou, D. Kondyli, A. Mouriki, O. Papaliou and Ch. Varouxi.

the interviewees. The interview guides had to be adapted to the profile of the interviewees, as well as to the external conditions prevailing (time available, location, type of accommodation, Covid-19 restrictions).

The research team contacted the interviewees from the displaced population in their homes, outside the camps or in public open spaces using the snowball method and the contacts of local NGOs to approach them. There were few refusals from the displaced population in Ioannina, but in Covid-affected Athens it was more difficult to find interviewees who would agree to be interviewed.

2.3 Limitations

While our research methods enable us to provide relevant and new information on various aspects of our research, there are nevertheless several limitations.

The main one relates to the difficulties posed by the Covid-19 pandemic and the seven-month lockdown that was imposed by the authorities (November 2020 to May 2021) and the health concerns of both interviewers and interviewees. In the case of the interviews with the displaced population, an additional limitation was the difficulty to access the refugee camps. As a result, alternative methods were sought to approach and interview asylum seekers and refugees. Most interviews had to be held outdoors, often standing up, leaning against a wall or sitting on make-shift benches, with a lot of noise and interruptions.

Most of the interviewees were in a poor psychological condition (traumatised and pessimistic about their future) and were often emotional during the interview (although none wished to stop the interview when asked by the researchers). A further problem was the

language barrier, despite the presence of native interpreters. According to some researchers' testimony, interpretation may have influenced respondents' narratives.

As regards the interviews with key informants, it is worth noting that despite their tight work schedule, and the postponement of some appointments due to Covid-19 cases, most of the key informants that were approached agreed to be interviewed, though mostly online rather than face to face, especially in Athens.

The greatest difficulties in holding in-person interviews related to accessing the host population. Issues of privacy, data protection, reluctance to speak to researchers and health concerns constituted an insurmountable barrier in Ioannina, but less so in Athens, where five interviews were held with recipients of social benefits from the national social protection system.

Overall, both the survey and the qualitative research were concluded under adverse circumstances, not only because of the restrictions and health risks related to the pandemic, but also because asylum seekers and refugees constitute a hard-to-survey vulnerable population.

Beyond the practical difficulties in undertaking interviews with the study populations, there are also some important analytical constraints in the data. First, the survey was conducted in only two locations and sampling was not fully random within these two locations, meaning the quantitative data are not locally or nationally representative of the study groups. Although the survey was quite detailed, we were inevitably unable to ask about all dimensions of welfare and cohesion. In addition, the survey was conducted at one point in time and therefore does not allow

us to investigate how outcomes may change over a period or how responses might have differed outside of the pandemic circumstances (although our analysis of assistance provision does attempt to distinguish between Covid-19-related assistance and support that was already available prior to the pandemic). We try to explore causal relationships to the extent possible, but we approach this with caution and repeat the necessary caveats to avoid unsubstantiated inferences.

In the qualitative research, the in-depth interviews reflect only the views of those who were selected

and chose to participate. The interviews will inevitably have been influenced to some degree by the perceptions of the researchers themselves, despite the team's proactive efforts to understand and mitigate any potential sources of bias.

Despite these limitations, we consider that the data collected provides rich and valuable insights on the provision of assistance to displacement-affected populations in Greece and on existing and potential connections between the humanitarian and national social protection systems.

3 Country context

3.1 Country overview

According to the official census, the population of Greece in 2011 was 10,816,286, while the World Bank estimates the population in 2020 to be 10,715,549.⁶ Three million lived in the capital, while approximately one-third of the total population is estimated to live in and around metropolitan Athens.

According to the World Bank, the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in current prices for Greece was US\$17,676 in 2020.⁷ The country was one of those most severely hit by the economic crisis that began in 2008–2009 (Mavridis, 2018; Nelson et al., 2017), as illustrated by its 2008 GDP per capita having reached a record high of \$31,997.⁸ According to Eurostat, more than a quarter of the population was at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2020 (27.5%),⁹ while the proportion of those severely materially deprived was at 16.5%.¹⁰

Despite the undisputed effects of the economic crisis, Greece remains a developed country, with an advanced high-income economy and a high quality of life. The country is ranked 32nd in the Human Development Index, with a score of 0.888, which puts it in the very high human development category.¹¹ Greece is also a unitary parliamentary republic and a member of the European Union and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.

State of social protection system

In the decades before the economic crisis, the Greek social protection system evolved without a clear and coherent strategy. As a result, a highly complex, fragmented, duplicative, bureaucratic and inefficient system was developed, characterised by unsustainable and residual social insurance schemes. There was a no real social safety net for persons at risk of poverty and social exclusion. Several attempted reforms were left unfinished, falling significantly short of the needed changes (OECD, 2013).

The financial crisis of the previous decade however, resulted in a significant overhaul of the social welfare system. This development was triggered by the Fiscal Adjustment Programmes signed in 2010, 2012 and 2015 between Greece, the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Among the implemented structural reforms, a crucial one was that of the social welfare system.

A number of government initiatives were introduced (Ziomas et al., 2018). Key among the changes was the establishment of a new organisation, the Organisation for Welfare Benefits and Social Solidarity (OPEKA), to act as a single public payment authority responsible for all welfare benefits. In addition, a means-tested minimum income scheme for households living in

6 <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=GR>

7 <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?locations=GR>

8 <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?locations=GR>

9 Eurostat, online data code: ILC_PEPSO1N (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc_peps01n/default/table?lang=en)

10 Eurostat, online data code: ILC_MDDD11 (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc_mddd11/default/table?lang=en)

11 <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/GRC>

extreme poverty – initially called Social Solidarity Income (SSI) and now the Minimum Guaranteed Income (MGI) – was introduced. SSI/MGI is based on income support, access to social services and goods, and provision of support services for (re)integration into the labour market. Several family benefits schemes were consolidated into a single child benefit: a non-contributory means-tested allowance financed by the state and managed by OPEKA. Finally, a means-tested housing benefit was established in 2019.

These complement the basic social insurance cash benefits which aim at compensating loss of employment income and are, in principle, contributory and earnings-related. These are unemployment benefit, sickness benefit, maternity benefits, the old-age pension and invalidity pension (Marini, 2020).

Displacement situation

Traditionally characterised as a country of emigration, Greece has transformed into a host country for immigrants since the early 1990s. Since the 2000s, it has become an important transit country for refugees and asylum seekers: situated on the EU's border with Turkey, it is a major part of the eastern Mediterranean route towards Europe.

The pre-2011 Greek asylum system had been criticised on a number of issues, such as the role of the directors of police directorates in initial decision making, the role of Advisory Refugee Committees on conducting asylum interviews, the proper implementation of EU Directives, and more importantly, the abolishment of the second instance procedure (appeals) (Karamanidou and Schuster, 2012; Afouxenidis et al., 2017). In two key cases, the

European Court of Human Rights and the Court of Justice of the European Union found that systemic deficiencies in the asylum procedure in Greece constituted violations of the European Convention on Human Rights and EU law. As a result, the asylum system went under a significant overhaul in 2011, but problems persisted in a number of areas, such as asylum procedures, unlawful returns, detention and reception conditions (Dimitriadi and Sarantaki, 2019; AIDA, 2020; ECRE, 2021a).

In 2015–2016, more than a million refugees and asylum seekers travelled from Turkey to Greece and then continued via the western Balkan route to other European countries (Clayton, 2016). In March 2016, that movement came to a halt as the result of a deal between Turkey and the EU, which left approximately 57,000 people stranded in the country (Amnesty International, 2016).

Even though the number of new arrivals since 2016 was greatly reduced, it never fully stopped. During the same period, the number of refugees exiting the country was never very high. As a consequence, by August 2020 UNHCR estimated that there were close to 121,400 refugees and migrants in Greece who had arrived and remained in the country since 2015–2016 (UNHCR, 2020b).

The majority of those who enter the country do so by sea. In line with the EU hotspot approach, as introduced in 2015 by the European Commission in the European Agenda on Migration, hotspots operate in the Eastern Aegean islands of Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Leros and Kos (Dimitriadi, 2017; Bousiou, 2020).

The majority of those who became stranded in the country in March 2016 or who arrived afterwards opted to apply for asylum in Greece.

As illustrated in Table 4, asylum applications rose from close to 13,000 in 2015 to over 50,000 in 2016 and reached more than 77,000 in 2019.

Most asylum seekers during this period were from Syria and Afghanistan.

Table 4 Asylum applications in Greece by country of nationality, 2015–2020

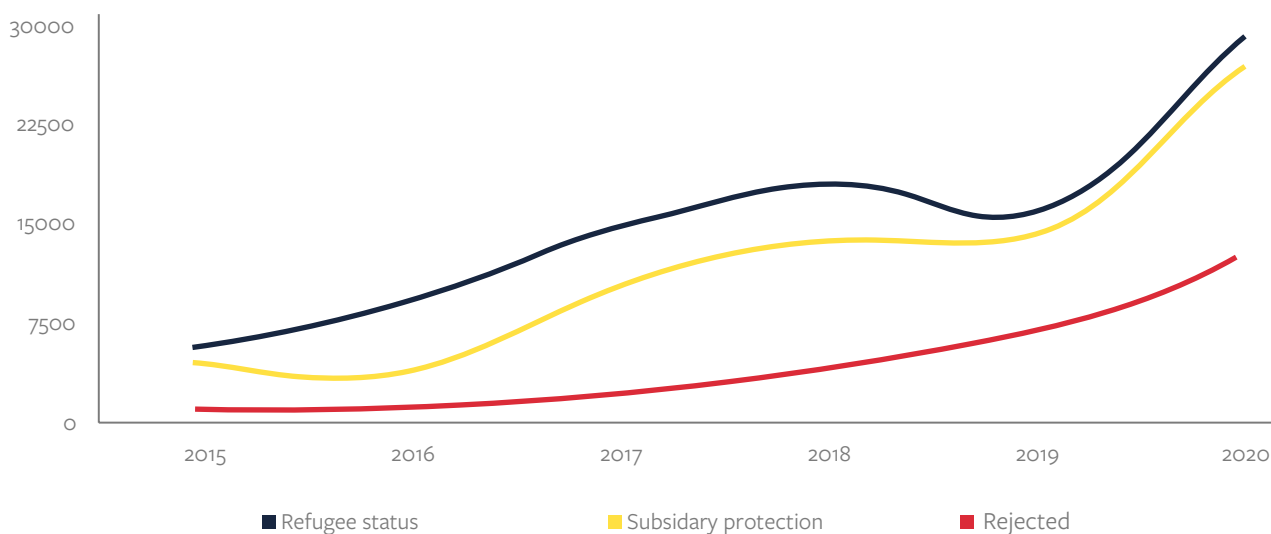
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
Syria	3495	26692	16396	13390	10856	7768	78597
Afghanistan	1721	4371	7567	11926	23828	11514	60927
Pakistan	1823	4695	8923	7743	7140	4146	34470
Iraq	661	4812	7924	9731	5738	1675	30541
Other nationalities	5497	10521	17851	24179	29725	15456	103229
Total	13197	51091	58661	66969	77287	40559	307764

Source: Compilation of data from Asylum Information Database (AIDA) Greece Reports: 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, Ministry of Migration and Asylum Yearly Report 2020.

While the vast majority of Syrians receive refugee status upon their application, the same does not apply for other nationalities. That is particularly the case for Pakistanis, with rejection rates of

over 90%. Based on the official figures, 34,325 people received the refugee status or subsidiary protection in 2020, up from 17,350 in 2019 and 15,210 in 2018 (Figure 1).

Figure 1 First instance decisions on applications, annual aggregated data



Source: Eurostat, online data code: MIGR_ASYDCFSTA

Accommodation for applicants and beneficiaries of international protection in Greece is mainly provided upon arrival through the RICs (technically only for 25 days), and then through open reception facilities, the ESTIA accommodation programme, shelters cooperating with the ministry and the HELIOS programme.

3.2 Legal and policy framework for national displacement response

3.2.1 International law

Greece is party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, which grant recognised refugees the same treatment with respect to public relief and assistance as is accorded to their nationals (although the channels of distributing such benefits may differ) (UNHCR, 2000). With regards to social security, recognised refugees are generally to be granted the same treatment as nationals but with some limitations (notably in relation to the payment of publicly funded benefits for people who do not fulfil the contribution conditions prescribed for the award of a normal pension) (ibid). The 1951 Convention/1967 Protocol do not set out standards for the reception of asylum seekers but UNHCR's Executive Committee has outlined principles for these, including that asylum seekers should have access to assistance to meet their basic needs, and that their rights under broader international human rights law should be respected, including, for example, the rights to social protection enshrined in the International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights (to which Greece is party) (IPU and UNHCR, 2017; UN, 1966).

As a Member of the European Union, Greece is greatly affected by European developments. Since 1999, the EU has established a Common

European Asylum System, which sets out common standards and cooperation to ensure that asylum seekers are treated equally in an open and fair system. Greece must therefore adhere to the legislative instruments under that system, such as the Reception Conditions Directive requiring that asylum seekers have access to housing, food, clothing, health care, education and employment to ensure a dignified standard of living (European Commission, n.d.). This system is governed by the European Asylum Support Office and the following five legislative instruments.

The (recast) Reception Conditions Directive ensures common standards for reception conditions regarding the reception of asylum applicants, including accommodation, food, healthcare, education and employment, are provided for asylum seekers across the EU. The (recast) Asylum Procedures Directive provides conditions and guarantees for fair asylum procedures, including the interview of applicants, legal aid provision and guarantees for vulnerable individuals. The (recast) Qualification Directive provides the framework for decision-making, the granting of international protection, and the content of said protection. The Dublin Regulation III (Dublin III) sets out the procedures for the determination of the Member State responsible for examining an application of international protection, while the EURODAC Regulation establishes a fingerprint database to support the application of the Dublin Regulation.

In addition to the above, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU establishes the protection of fundamental rights for all individuals in the EU.

Another important element to be taken under consideration regarding the European and Greek framework is the 2016 EU-Turkey

Statement (European Council, 2016). In accordance with the Statement, all third-country nationals arriving to Greece through the Greek islands after 20 March 2016 would be returned to Turkey. To implement this, the movement of refugees and migrants arriving to Greece through the Eastern Aegean islands was systematically restricted within the island on which they arrived, imposing a ‘geographical restriction’¹² ‘until the completion of the asylum procedure’. An exception to this ‘geographical restriction’ was made for those who were not profiled as ‘vulnerable’ and were transferred to the mainland as soon as possible. This measure and implementation of ‘geographical restriction’ has nevertheless drawn heavy criticism from a number of actors, who over the years have asked for its termination (Greek National Commission for Human Rights, 2019b, 2020b).

The main Greek Law on asylum (L. 4636/2019), the International Protection Act (IPA), was issued in November 2019. Among its provisions, it transposes the EU’s Reception Conditions Directive, Asylum Procedures Directive and Qualification Directive. This law has been criticised by national and international human rights bodies such as the Greek Ombudsman, UNHCR and other organisations, since it attempts to lower protection standards and create unwarranted procedural and substantive hurdles for people seeking international protection (Greek National Commission for Human Rights, 2019a; Greek Ombudsman, 2019; UNHCR, 2019a).

Under the IPA, full and automatic access to the labour market for recognised refugees and

subsidiary protection beneficiaries is provided under the same conditions as nationals, without any obligation to obtain a work permit. Applicants for international protection (asylum seekers) have the right to work six months after the date of submission of their application. In addition, the 2019 National Integration Strategy provides for several actions to improve access to employment for beneficiaries of international protection, though these actions have not yet implemented. However, high unemployment rates and further obstacles such as difficulty in getting a tax registration number (AFM) or opening a bank account prevent the integration of beneficiaries into the labour market (AIDA, 2020).

IPA also stipulates that children who are beneficiaries of international protection and asylum-seeking children are entitled to study at primary and secondary education institutions of the public education system, under the same conditions as nationals. However, a series of obstacles makes it difficult for refugee children to access the Greek education system, further complicated by the Covid-19 pandemic. As noted by the Greek Ombudsman, this is particularly evident in children on the Eastern Aegean islands. Out of 2,090 school-aged children living in the RICs in January 2021, only 178 (8.5%) were enrolled in school, of whom only 7 (0.3%) had actually been able to attend it (Greek Ombudsman, 2021).

Free access to health care for beneficiaries of international protection is provided under the same conditions as for nationals, pursuant to Law 4368/2016. In addition, access to public

12 ‘Geographical restriction is referred here as an administrative decision imposing geographical restriction of movement for certain profiles (non-vulnerable) of refugees. Until 31 December 2019, the geographical restriction could be lifted in respect of vulnerable persons. After the Ministerial Decision 1140/2.12.2019 which amended the relevant law, the geographical restriction may be lifted by a decision of the Manager of the RIC for vulnerable persons (AIDA, 2020)

health services and pharmaceutical treatment for persons without social insurance and vulnerable social groups is also applicable for asylum seekers and members of their families. Access is provided via the Provisional Insurance and Healthcare Number for Foreigners (PAAYPA). However, access is hindered by the lack of interpreters and cultural mediators, as well as shortage of resources due to the financial crisis and the austerity measures on the public health system.

According to IPA, beneficiaries of international protection should enjoy the same rights as Greek citizens and receive the necessary social assistance, according to the terms applicable to Greek citizens. However, a series of bureaucratic barriers prevent international protection holders from the enjoyment of their rights (AIDA, 2020). While they are eligible for a number of services and national schemes, the fact that they cannot fulfil technical requirements, such as having a lease in their name or possessing key documents, leads to their practical exclusion (Tramountanis, 2021).

An amendment on the IPA came into force in 2020 with a bill entitled ‘Improvement of migration legislation’ (Law 4686/2020), which aims to speed up asylum procedures while ‘responding to practical challenges in the implementation of the law’. However, it is argued that this amendment further weakens basic guarantees for persons in need of protection, increases the number of applications which can be rejected as manifestly unfounded and introduces a set of provisions that can lead to arbitrary detention of asylum seekers and third-country nationals (Greek National Commission for Human Rights, 2020a).

3.2.2 Overarching national strategy for refugee response

Integration of the displaced population in the host society is envisaged through the recently unveiled National Strategy for the Integration of Applicants and Beneficiaries of International Protection (Ministry of Migration and Asylum, 2021). The new strategy revolves around four pillars: (1) pre-integration measures for asylum seekers, so that adults will be transitioned to employment and minors from non-formal to formal education; (2) social integration of beneficiaries of international protection through the development of intensive education and training programmes that will facilitate their access to the labour market; (3) prevention and protection against all forms of violence, exploitation and abuse, by strengthening reporting mechanisms; and (4) monitoring of the integration process using commonly accepted and comparable indicators.

Emphasis is placed on mapping the skills of the displaced population, the enhancement of their educational and professional knowledge and skills, and language learning. The proposed actions focus on independent living, social housing, employment and welfare, in order to ensure refugees’ autonomous living, so that they do not depend on state benefits.

The new Strategy replaces the 2019 Integration Strategy for Third Country Nationals (Ministry of Migration and Asylum, 2019) that was never implemented (Greek National Commission for Human Rights, 2020b). Integration also features as one of the government’s six priorities for migration management, as unveiled by the Prime Minister in May 2021 (Kathimerini, 2021a), while in late October 2021, the Ministry for Migration

and Asylum and UNHCR signed a memorandum of understanding on strengthening cooperation on the integration of refugees in Greece (UNHCR, 2021b). The impact of the 2021 Strategy remains to be seen and evaluated.

The official approach towards the integration of beneficiaries of international protection is also demonstrated via the HELIOS programme implemented by IOM and its partners with the support of the Greek government and funded by the EU (IOM Greece, n.d.). HELIOS aims to promote the independent living and social integration of the beneficiaries and is organised around five components: accommodation support via rent subsidies; integration courses provided by Integration Learning Centres; integration monitoring; employability support through job counselling, access to job-related certifications and networking with private employers; and sensitisation of the host community through workshops and other events. Beneficiaries are entitled to a minimum of six months and a maximum of 12 months of rental subsidies.

However, not all beneficiaries of international protection in the country benefit or have benefited from HELIOS. On the contrary, from 2018–2020, only one out of every seven (of the 71,812 persons that received international protection at first and second instance in the country) were able to access rental subsidies under HELIOS (RSA and Stiftung Pro Asyl, 2021). As of September 2021, only 1,878 households were benefiting from rental subsidies, or a total of 4,507 individuals (HELIOS, 2021).

Apart from the HELIOS programme, the trend has been towards a harsher approach towards applicants and beneficiaries of international protection.

Under the IPA of 2019, applicants for international protection have the right to work after six months from the date of submission of their application. This six-month period was not included in the previous law of 2016; it was added ‘in order to make the asylum system unattractive to third-country nationals’ (Hellenic Parliament, 2019). A significant side-effect of this delay will be people turning to undeclared work, thereby falling victim to labour exploitation (UNHCR, 2019a).

Furthermore, according to a recent amendment to the asylum legislation (L.4674/2020), ‘after the issuance of the decision granting the status of international protection, material reception conditions in form of cash or in kind are discontinued. Said beneficiaries residing in accommodation facilities, including hotels and apartments have the obligation to leave them, in a 30-days period since the communication of the decision granting international protection’. Due to this provision, a significant number of refugees have been left without a safety net and measures to ensure their self-reliance, and ended up homeless in Athens and other cities, with limited access to basic services such as food, healthcare and education for their children (Smith, 2020). Many even choose to move to or near reception facilities to have a place to sleep.

Finally, another important development in June 2021 was the publication of the Joint Ministerial Decision that designated Turkey as a ‘safe third country’ for asylum seekers from Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Somalia (GCR, 2021). According to this decision, applications lodged by those nationalities can be rejected as ‘inadmissible’ without being examined on their merits.

The approach towards applicants and beneficiaries of international protection was reflected in the words of the Minister of Migration and Asylum when he said in an interview that ‘benefits and hospitality act as a pull factor (for them) to come to our country and take advantage of these benefits’. Therefore, he said, ‘our aim is to grant asylum to those entitled within 2–3 months and from then on, we cut any benefits and accommodation, as all this works as a pull factor [...] Greece is cutting these benefits. Anyone after the recognition of the asylum status is responsible for himself’ (Proto Thema, 2020).

3.2.3 International humanitarian response

To understand the humanitarian response in Greece, a broader context is needed. As a member of the EU, Greece received support from EU funds and institutions. Between 2015 and 2021, the EU allocated Greece more than €3.1 billion through a combination of the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) (€2.06 billion), the Internal Security Fund (ISF) (€450 million) and the Emergency Support Instrument (ESI) (€643.6 million) (European Commission, 2021a).

Even though the EU is one of the main donors of humanitarian aid, this was traditionally conceived as a policy only for non-EU countries. It was with the establishment of the ESI in 2016 that it became possible for the first time to carry out long-term EU-financed humanitarian aid operations within the EU (Dittmer and Lorenz, 2021). The ESI was established in recognition that the available instruments (the Union Civil Protection Mechanism, AMIF, ISF, the Solidarity Fund, the European Social Fund and European Regional Development Fund) were not suitable for

addressing the wide-ranging humanitarian needs within the EU. Its objective was to provide faster and more needs-based emergency humanitarian support, complementing the response of the affected Member States (DG ECHO, 2018).

Around 70% of ESI funding was delivered to UN agencies, such as UNHCR (57%, €369 million) and IOM (9%, €56 million). The sectors funded were shelter and settlement (42%), basic needs assistance through multipurpose cash transfers (19%) and protection (child-friendly spaces, access to information and legal support) (17%) (DG ECHO, 2018). The involvement of the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations facilitated the swift implementation of the proposed measures.

Within this framework, UNHCR played a pivotal role in delivering assistance in Greece. The two main components of assistance as provided within the ESTIA programme were urban accommodation and cash assistance to asylum seekers. UNHCR was already implementing an accommodation scheme for relocation candidates in late 2015, a scheme which in mid-2017 was incorporated in ESTIA and funded by EU. The Accommodation Scheme provides rented housing to vulnerable asylum seekers and refugees and until December 2020 was implemented by UNHCR through partnerships with national and international NGOs and municipalities. The large majority of those accommodated are families, with the average family size being four members, and the main nationalities being Syrian, Iraqi, Afghan, Iranian or Congolese (Democratic Republic). Starting on 1 January 2021, the Greek state became responsible for the implementation of ESTIA¹³ (now titled ESTIA 2021), while funding continues to come

13 The programme was called ESTIA when it was administered by UNHCR, was renamed to ESTIA II during the July–December 2020 period and is now titled ESTIA 2021.

from the EU's AMIF. As of August 2021, close to 24,000 accommodation places were available in 15 cities and three islands across Greece (Ministry of Migration and Asylum, 2021).

Cash assistance was implemented until September 2021 by the UNHCR, in collaboration with the Greece Cash Alliance partners, comprising the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Catholic Relief Services and METAdrasi. In June 2021, 58,757 eligible refugees and asylum seekers (35,415 families) predominantly from Afghanistan, Syria and Pakistan received cash

assistance in 90 locations (UNHCR, 2021c). The amount of cash assistance distributed to each household is proportionate to family size, ranging between €75 for an individual in catered accommodation to €420 for a family of four members or more in self-catered accommodation (see Table 5 for a more detailed account). More than half (55%) of those receiving cash assistance are located in the Attica region. The UNHCR's cash assistance programme was concluded at the end of September 2021, and as of 1 October the Greek authorities assumed responsibility for providing assistance to asylum seekers to cover their basic needs.

4 Social protection and humanitarian assistance for the displaced

4.1 Access to social protection and humanitarian assistance for the forcibly displaced

In Greece, humanitarian assistance is totally distinct from the national social protection system. The former is addressed to asylum seekers, while the latter is addressed to the host population as well as to third country nationals with a valid residence permit and (with certain limitations) to those with refugee status.

It should be noted that the humanitarian system of assistance implemented in Greece has several characteristics commonly found in state social protection systems. It is not based on the actual needs of individuals but rather on their status (that of asylum seeker). The exact financial amount, the time and means of delivery are predefined and therefore predictable (i.e., a cash card is credited on the first week of every month with the standard amount to which the beneficiary is entitled). Its value is set by the government, and as such it is dependent on the national social protection and migration policies. In addition, since 2021, this assistance has been implemented by the Greek government, yet it is not social protection in the strict sense, since the Greek system of social protection is significantly broader in scope and target population and is not focused exclusively on a particular group. The Greek humanitarian assistance system can thus be characterised as a ‘hybrid’ form of the two systems.¹⁴

The **national social protection system** is the sole responsibility of the Greek state and is administered and funded by it. Access to its benefits and social services is not restricted by law to Greek nationals but is addressed to all vulnerable people within Greek territory who fulfil certain eligibility criteria. The main precondition is legal and permanent residence in the country. In theory, recognised refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection can receive the guaranteed minimum income, unemployment benefits, disability benefit, housing allowance, family allowances and maternity/child benefits provided they meet certain requirements (see Table 7). However, because of the limited financial resources of the Greek state and the increasing amount of people in need of social protection over time, eligibility criteria are quite complex even for natives, let alone for displaced populations. In addition to complex eligibility criteria, most beneficiaries of international protection are not aware of these benefits and face a series of bureaucratic barriers to accessing them.

Humanitarian assistance schemes

(accommodation and cash) are implemented by the Ministry of Migration and Asylum and are EU-funded. Until recently, the scheme was administered by the UNHCR with the assistance of national and international NGOs. After a transition period, the housing component was transferred by UNHCR to the Greek state in January 2021, while cash assistance was transferred in September/October 2021 (UNHCR, n.d.; UNHCR, 2017).¹⁵

¹⁴ It should be noted that the Greek government also prefers to call it ‘humanitarian assistance’ for reasons related to implementation and financing.

¹⁵ Also see a range of factsheets at <http://estia.unhcr.gr>.

4.1.1 Current assistance for displaced populations

Cash assistance to asylum seekers

The cash assistance scheme was introduced in November 2015 but was only materialised in April 2017 (CaLP, 2020; UNHCR, 2021d). Since then, it has been delivered through the Greece Cash Alliance, which is a group of NGOs partnering with and led by UNHCR, with European Commission funding and in cooperation with the ministry (then called the Greek Ministry of Migration Policy). In 2018, it comprised Catholic Relief Services (in partnership with Caritas), the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (in partnership with Hellenic Red Cross) and METAdrasi, a national NGO.

Asylum seekers who reside in formal reception or accommodation facilities for asylum seekers recognised by the Greek authorities, such as open reception facilities, RICs, the ESTIA accommodation programme, and shelters cooperating with the ministry (Ministry of Migration and Asylum, 2021b) are eligible for cash assistance. (Until 1 July 2021, cash assistance was also provided to asylum seekers who

were self-accommodated.) The cash transfer begins one month after the registration of applicants and is terminated one month after their asylum application is processed.

The value of cash assistance is based on and equals the Minimum Expenditure Basket, which was developed in 2016, taking into consideration the national poverty line, the minimum wage and the value of cash transfers delivered to Greek families assisted by the SSI/MGI. To avoid negative repercussions from providing asylum seekers with cash assistance of a higher value than the national SSI/MGI, the Greek government imposed an upper limit on the value of cash assistance, which cannot exceed that of SSI/MGI national cash transfers (Pavanello, 2018).

The monthly cash allowance, in the form of a prepaid card, now ranges from €75 for an individual to €210 for a family of four or more in the catered camps (since May 2017 the majority of the camps are non-catered), while in the non-catered camps the amount of cash assistance ranges from €150 for one person to €420 for a family of four or more (Table 5).¹⁶

Table 5 Cash assistance amounts

Family size	Where meals are provided	Where meals are NOT provided
Individual over 18 years	€75	€150
A couple, or a parent and child	€135	€270
A family of three	€160	€320
A family of four or more	€210	€420

Source: UNHCR (n.d.)

In our survey, the most common transfer for applicants of international protection (asylum seekers) was the ESTIA cash assistance (Table 6).

Even so, only half of asylum-seeking respondents reported access to this scheme in the past 3 months, despite the fact that it is supposed to

¹⁶ The amounts for larger families (6+ members) have been recently abolished by ministerial decree (see UNHCR, n.d.).

begin one month after asylum registration. Small percentages of beneficiaries and applicants of international protection also reported that, in the

previous three months, they had received cash assistance other than that provided by ESTIA (specifically from an NGO).

Table 6 Proportion of survey respondents reporting transfer receipt in past 3 months, by transfer type¹⁷

	Beneficiaries of international protection (refugees/ those with subsidiary protection)	Applicants of international protection (asylum seekers)
UNHCR (ESTIA) cash assistance	9%	50%
Other NGO transfer	1%	5%
ESTIA accommodation	3%	10%
HELIOS accommodation	15%	0%

In the last year, this situation has further deteriorated due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the additional delays in the administrative identification procedures.

It should be noted that the viability of the cash assistance project is provisional and depends on the availability of funding; the financial amount can and has changed over time and is provisional on the funds provided by the EU, the influx of people in need and the policy decisions of the Greek Ministry of Migration and Asylum. The Greek government decides on the allocation of the resources provided for the displaced based on policy grounds and the cost of living in Greece.

Accommodation assistance to applicants of international protection

Accommodation assistance to applicants of international protection is mainly provided

via the ESTIA 2021 programme,¹⁸ which is currently implemented by the Greek Ministry of Migration and Asylum. At its present iteration (August 2021), it provides 23,786 accommodation places (3,731 apartments and 206 rooms in 20 buildings), distributed in 15 cities and three islands across Greece. Of the 17,580 people accommodated as of the end of August 2021, 3,830 were recognised refugees; 46% of the residents are children. The clear majority of those accommodated are families, with the average family size being five people, while more than one in four residents have at least one of the vulnerabilities that make them eligible for the accommodation scheme (Ministry of Migration and Asylum, 2021a).

In addition to ESTIA 2021, accommodation to applicants of international protection is also provided in open reception facilities, in RICs and in shelters cooperating with the ministry.

¹⁷ Values do not add up to 100% within the column as some respondents may be accessing more than one type of benefit.

¹⁸ For details of the ESTIA 2021 accommodation programme, see Ministry of Migration and Asylum (2021b).

Cash assistance to recognised refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection

Beneficiaries of international protection (i.e., recognised refugees and recipients of subsidiary protection) stop receiving humanitarian assistance once their asylum application is successful.¹⁹ In principle, beneficiaries of international protection become eligible to apply for a number of state

benefits, such as the MGI, unemployment benefits, rent allowance, child and disability benefits, etc. However, the formal prerequisites for these benefits constitute a significant barrier. As shown in Table 7, the main requirement for the provision of several benefits is legal and permanent residence in the country for at least five years, which by design has excluded almost all beneficiaries of international protection from the 2015–2016 period.

Table 7 Requirements for applying for Greek state benefits

Benefit	Main Inclusion criteria
Minimum guaranteed income	Specific income and assets criteria, depending on the size and composition of the household.
Child benefit	Specific income and assets criteria, depending on the size and composition of the household. Legal and permanent resident of Greece during the past five years. Third-country nationals (who have not been granted refugee status and are not beneficiaries of subsidiary protection) legal and permanent resident during the past 12 years.
Rent subsidy	Specific income and assets criteria, depending on the size and composition of the household. Legal and permanent resident of Greece during the last five years. Third-country nationals (who have not been granted refugee status and are not beneficiaries of subsidiary protection) legal and permanent resident during the past 12 years
Childbirth benefit	Specific income and assets criteria, depending on the size and composition of the household. Legal and permanent resident of Greece during the past five years. Third-country nationals (who have not been granted refugee status and are not beneficiaries of subsidiary protection) legal and permanent resident during the past 12 years
Unemployment benefit	To be unemployed involuntarily, not to be working for more than three days a week or 12 days a month, to be registered at the Manpower Employment Organisation (OAED), to be capable of and available for work, to have worked at least 125 days during the 14 months preceding job loss.

¹⁹ Likewise, humanitarian assistance is terminated when a final decision is issued that rejects the request for international protection.

Benefit	Main Inclusion criteria
Disability (welfare) benefits	Depending on the invalidity/disability level and the kind of chronic illness, recipients are entitled to different levels of care provision. The level of the disability/ welfare benefit is positively related to the level of disability.

Source: Compilation by the research team

Another crucial aspect has to do with the extremely limited awareness of beneficiaries of the existence of these benefits. As clearly illustrated in Table 8 below, beneficiaries and applicants of international protection are almost completely unaware of these benefits.

Table 8 Which of these regular cash or in-kind transfers have you ever heard of?

Name of benefit	Refugees		Asylum seekers	
	Heard of	Not heard of	Heard of	Not heard of
Minimum guaranteed income	1.9%	98.1%	2.1%	97.9%
Child benefit	1.3%	98.7%	0%	100%
Rent subsidy	1.6%	98.4%	0.7%	99.3%
Childbirth benefit	0.6%	99.4%	0.2%	99.8%
Unemployment benefit	8%	92%	5.6%	94.4%
Food and/or basic material assistance (FEAD/)	1.3%	98.7%	2.1%	97.9%
Disability (welfare) benefits	1%	99%	0.5%	99.5%
Social solidarity allowance to uninsured elderly people (aged 67+)	0%	100.0%	0%	100.0%
Benefit to families living in mountainous and/or disadvantaged areas	0%	100.0%	0%	100.0%

Apart from the unemployment benefit, where 8% of refugees and 5.6% of asylum seekers are at least aware of it, for all other benefits the awareness rate is close to or less than 2%.²⁰

Accommodation assistance to recognised refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection

As already mentioned, asylum applicants residing in formal reception or accommodation facilities are obliged to leave these facilities within 30 days of being granted the status of international protection. Thereafter, they have to cope by themselves.

The only EU-sponsored option for accommodation for beneficiaries of international protection is the HELIOS programme (see section 3.2.1). However, to enrol in HELIOS, beneficiaries must meet a number of eligibility criteria: they need to have received official notification of the Greek Asylum Service's decision granting international protection status (refugee status and subsidiary protection); they need to have been recognised after 1 January 2018 (with a few exceptions for those recognised in 2017); and at the time of notification of the decision granting international protection status, they should be residents in one of the accommodation schemes of the Greek reception system or in shelters or protective housing programmes (e.g., for sexual and gender-based violence survivors or victims of trafficking). HELIOS applicants must also have a personal bank account in Greece and a tax registration number (AFM), which is required for their rental contract.

HELIOS beneficiaries are offered support to find an apartment and enter into a lease agreement

directly with the apartment owner. The amount of the rental subsidy varies depending on the size of the household and ranges between €301 and €1060; additional rental costs, paid on a monthly basis, are also covered for an amount between €162 and €630 (IOM, 2021).

Currently, the HELIOS programme covers 4,507 individuals who benefit from rent subsidies, while 2,675 individuals attend its integration courses (HELIOS, 2021). As pointed out by key informants, not all eligible refugees apply for the programme, in particular those who expect imminently to receive their travel documents and be able to relocate to another European country.

As one key informant pointed out, although not all applications are accepted, there are no segments of the vulnerable groups that are left out. Single women, mothers, and unaccompanied minors are prioritised in the provision of assistance, followed by families, the elderly and the disabled persons.

Language classes are mixed, with both men and women attending; however, as a key informant from a local NGO in Ioannina pointed out, some men are reluctant to allow their wives to attend the courses. Other key informants noted that women are more eager to learn, to enrol and finish Greek language courses or to look for a job and financially support their family. Some of the shortcomings of the programme highlighted by our interlocutors relate to the lumping together of students in the same class, regardless of their educational level, the unsuitability of the educational material and the non-availability of childcare facilities for mothers wishing to attend the courses.

During the two eight-month-long lockdowns, courses were provided online via an asynchronous

20 The difference between refugees and asylum seekers concerning the knowledge of unemployment benefit is not statistically significant since, $p=0.179$.

learning platform. They were obligatory; exemptions were possible for health, disability or maternity reasons. Those dropping out were mainly refugees who left the country, according to a key informant responsible for the regional programme.

4.1.2 Effectiveness in addressing needs of the displaced

Assessments of the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance vary among key informants. Some argue (in particular those directly involved in the implementation of humanitarian assistance), that the current approach has not led to exclusion, disempowerment or stigmatisation of beneficiaries, but quite to the contrary. However, the majority of key informants (especially from NGOs) stressed that the support provided to the displaced through both systems does not do enough to help them to live independently in the long run or to integrate socially and financially into Greek society.

The humanitarian cash assistance project is a complicated process in terms of logistics since it deals with a large amount of personal data and information, while many different actors are engaged in its management. An additional difficulty in the period before 2021 was the fact that the UNHCR used its own database, which was different from the one established by the Greek authorities, whereas a unified database would have greatly facilitated the operation of the system. Another aspect of the humanitarian assistance system that causes problems is that the main bulk of the public administration authorities responsible for the management of social assistance are concentrated in large urban centres, mainly in Athens and Thessaloniki. As a result, migrants and refugees who

seek help mostly gather in large cities, where their living conditions are more precarious than in the rural areas or the islands.

More positively, the processes for delivering the assistance have now become more or less standardised, the members of the Greece Cash Alliance cooperate well and important knowhow has been acquired.

Asylum seekers who receive cash assistance and live in the ESTIA apartments are in a better position than those living in non-catered camps. This does not necessarily imply that they can cover their basic needs, however. For example, families with babies and young children with health problems and with no other source of income than the cash assistance struggle to make ends meet; moreover, during the two lockdowns, in the event of an emergency, they were unable to seek help from a private doctor or make an appointment in public hospitals.

Asylum seekers have, in theory, more service benefits, and there are more organisations to support them, compared to recognised refugees, who are considerably smaller in number. Undoubtedly, those who constitute the lowest priority for policymakers are single, young asylum-seeking men who do not qualify as 'vulnerable'. As a key informant from an international NGO pointed out: 'this dynamic group is left to rot in the reception centres, and they eventually become easy prey to criminal activity'. On the other hand, those who do obtain vulnerability status, according to another key informant from a national NGO, 'become disempowered and passive recipients of benefits, rather than being motivated to become self-reliant'.

Although the living conditions of the displaced populations are better in the ESTIA apartments than in the reception centres or the camps, they still can fall short of decent living conditions. During our face-to-face interviews in Ioannina, we visited apartments that were very run down, with serious humidity problems, without basic amenities like proper heating or a washing machine. As the residents don't have the resources to refurbish, they have no choice but to settle for substandard conditions.

Since this scheme came under the control of the Greek state, a key informant pointed out, recognised refugees are now required to find their own accommodation within a month of receiving their asylum decision, whereas previously they were given six months. As several key informants noted, this could result in great numbers of recognised refugees being left homeless.

The vast majority of asylum seekers and refugees interviewed believe that the effectiveness of the cash assistance project is very limited and cannot cover all the people in need for as long as they need it. To them, the humanitarian cash assistance system does not serve its purpose, which is to support all the people in need; rather, 'it is provided only so that the authorities can claim that they help asylum seekers and refugees'.

Many interviewees from the displaced population consider the social protection system as much more effective and well-organised than humanitarian assistance. Certainly, the state social protection system is much broader in its scope and provides a safety net for the more vulnerable segments of the population for as

long as they meet the eligibility requirements. As one displaced respondent pointed out, they would feel 'much more comfortable and secure' with the social protection assistance provided by the national system, rather than by humanitarian assistance, which is short-term and ends when asylum is granted. Asylum seekers spoke about how social protection would allow them to be treated the same as the host population, receiving the same assistance under the same conditions and by the same competent institutions and processes: 'if we make the two systems into one, I could go to the offices here and ask any queries I may have or they can inform me on my rights or help me issue the necessary documents and find solutions to my problems. I can reach the authorities.'

Several key informants felt that humanitarian assistance is not conceived as the duty of the competent national, European and international authorities to give refuge, comfort and prospects to the displaced, but as an ad hoc act of humanitarianism in terms of 'philanthropy' or provisional 'philoxenia' (hospitality). This approach is in line with what many key informants describe as the Greek state's strategy of 'non inclusiveness', which is reflected in the opacity and inconsistency of the system: 'new internal documents come every day to introduce changes, generating confusion' a key informant pointed out. According to a press release co-signed by 20 civil society organisations, the impact of the continuous institutional changes jeopardises the rights of applicants for international protection and the guarantees of the asylum procedure (RSA, 2020). Other key informants make the point that the EU as a whole is gradually becoming more conservative and legislation about migration is getting increasingly confusing and restrictive. This

may relate to the almost complete lack of legal pathways for economic migrants to get to EU countries. Consequently, people moving towards European countries have no option other than to enter and apply for asylum in Greece, hoping they will be granted refugee status or subsidiary protection. Alternatively, a visa for temporary seasonal work could be a more realistic and viable solution for people who wish to arrive and work in an EU country.

4.1.3 Barriers to access to assistance

As the majority of key informants and the displaced interviewed in both sites pointed out, the main problems for asylum seekers in accessing humanitarian assistance include lack of information, delays in registration, the complexity and large number of documents required, and above all the limited scope of the assistance provided. Other obstacles reported by asylum seekers we interviewed for this research include the opacity of the system and not being able to speak Greek preventing them from claiming their rights. Interviewees painted a vivid picture of the numerous barriers they are confronted with, which differ depending on their status.

Barriers that asylum seekers face:

- A lack of guidance or reliable information regarding access to cash assistance and related services, as well as regarding which organisation implements the cash assistance programme or how to reach them. This is mostly reported by asylum seekers who had not gone through the RICs and were self-accommodated,²¹ whereas in

the camps there are many organisations which support the displaced. Individuals who have entered the country and have not yet applied for international protection complain about their inability to gain access to humanitarian assistance. The problematic access to asylum in the mainland is further documented in reports by the UN Committee Against Torture Report for Greece (2019), the Greek National Commission for Human Rights (2020b) and Council of Europe (2019).

- The abolition of the social insurance number (AMKA) for asylum seekers in July 2019 created serious problems for the displaced population, not only in terms of healthcare provision or access to employment but also regarding children's vaccination and their enrolment in schools. The PAAYPA,²² introduced after several months delay, has addressed these problems, but severe delays in acquiring a PAAYPA are still recorded (HumanRights360, 2020).
- Additional communication problems in accessing the registration system and inquiring about the progress of a case, owing to poor digital connections (via Skype) and non-functioning telephone lines. Indicative of this situation is that the Greek Ombudsman described Skype as part of the problem rather than a technical solution (Greek Ombudsman, 2017).
- The inefficiency of the Greek public service in relation to the asylum process. Asylum seekers report long delays in their interviews and poor and fragmentary communication with the authorities, especially for those with less spoken languages. A former asylum seeker described his experiences as follows: 'we could communicate only with one employee, we

21 This was the case in the past; currently those that are self-accommodated are not entitled any humanitarian assistance.

22 In case of a negative answer to the asylum application, the PAAYPA (Provisional Insurance and Healthcare Number for Foreigners) is automatically abolished, while in case of an affirmative answer, it transitions to an AMKA. See Joint Ministerial Decision 199/31-01-2020.

could not understand each other, he didn't answer my questions and we could not visit any office to ask about the system. And the time lapsed and therefore I only received the cash allowance for eight months, because by then I was recognised as a refugee'. The problem was compounded during the Covid-19 lockdowns, when it was extremely difficult to contact and make appointments with the Greek public services (including legal support and medical care). It seems that the NGOs that used to mediate and assist asylum seekers in the process have been less inclined to offer support over the past year (apparently due to the pandemic restrictions).

- Difficulty in accessing medical care due to the lack of interpreters or cultural mediators. In some cases, asylum seekers were denied examination by doctors in public hospitals if they were not accompanied by interpreters (see also AIDA, 2020). This reflects a general problem of communication due to the scarcity of interpretation services for asylum seekers.
- Lack of support for young mothers with preschool age infants.
- Lack of specialised psychological support and difficulty in arranging appointments with a psychologist with the mediation of NGOs, especially during lockdowns.
- Lack of legal support and counselling when they need to make asylum applications or appeal negative decisions, a point also raised by the Council of Europe's Anti-Torture Committee (Council of Europe, 2020).

Barriers faced by beneficiaries of international protection:

- Serious communication problems between the applicants and the asylum service – whether for a simple update on the progress of their

case or for receiving the announcement of their case status upgrade. In several cases, the applicants realised that they had been upgraded to 'recognised refugee' status only when they stopped receiving benefits.

- Lack of information and understanding of the prerequisites and the supporting documents that need to be collected, due to the complexity of the procedures and bureaucracy. Assistance in filling in applications correctly for various social programmes is often unavailable.
- The very brief transition period from one system to the other. As soon as asylum seekers are granted refugee status, they 'log out' of the humanitarian assistance system and most are left without help as there is no universal 'integration bridge' for all recognised refugees, while the social protection system excludes them in practice from its services. Within a month of receiving a positive answer, they have to vacate their ESTIA apartments, regardless of whether they have received their documents or not (ID card, tax registration number, social insurance number – AMKA or PAAYPA). Those documents, together with the tenancy contract, are required not only to qualify for the HELIOS programme but also to be included in the civil protection system (via the Migrant Integration Centres – KEMs) and other poverty management services. As the refugees point out, they can't organise their lives and stand on their feet in the community in just one month; nor can they find a job and a house and meet all their basic needs. Instead, a longer transition period of between three and six months is required, so that they have the time to adjust to their new situation.
- The long waiting period (ranging from six months to a year) for recognised refugees to receive their legal documents from the moment they stop receiving benefits, results in impoverishment and

marginalisation. In those cases, as a refugee put it, the HELIOS programme is an elusive dream for the recognised refugees who don't even have access to the 'social grocery stores' and the 'social pharmacies' set up by the municipalities. The only option for some seems to be to earn a livelihood through illicit activities.

- The Asylum Service's slower administrative process for the delivery of necessary documents to the recognised refugees is in stark contrast with the refugees' obligation to exit immediately from the asylum system (ESTIA). This is viewed as the most important and insurmountable barrier to recognised refugees entering the social protection system.
- The KEMs, which are the social structures responsible for connecting recognised refugees with the national system of social protection, have not been adequately staffed yet and do not yet function properly.
- The weak interconnection between the different services that deal with international protection prevents recognised refugees from claiming the rights that they are entitled and which the host population enjoy.

Overall, the displaced are not always aware of their rights and obligations in terms of access to the institutions and institutional processes and mechanisms, or in terms of contacting and forwarding their requests to the competent authorities. As a result, they are often forced to seek informal ways find information and assistance. Further digitalisation, the expanded digital presence of the competent organisations and more networking between the involved could improve the situation, as a key informant from an international NGO suggested.

4.2 Linkages between the humanitarian approach and the national social protection system

The humanitarian assistance system was designed to meet the emergency needs of displaced populations when they first arrive in the country and for a short period of time. At the early stages of the refugee 'crisis', it was the National Centre for Social Solidarity (EKKA) that was responsible for arranging the accommodation of vulnerable refugees. In particular, all organisations were obliged to refer vulnerable populations (including unaccompanied minors) to EKKA, as it was not possible at the time for them to provide housing. Moreover, as a key informant from an international organisation pointed out, NGOs and the state authorities cooperate in every programme related to integration or the voluntary return of asylum seekers and refugees: 'nothing can be implemented without communication and contact with the corresponding state body'.

The social protection system is administered and financed by the state, and the agency responsible for delivering social benefits is OPEKA. A well-informed stakeholder described the Greek social protection system as one of the least developed among the wealthier countries and as an ad hoc patchwork of micro-systems of benefits serving special interests – incomplete and without a uniform rationale. As much as 63% of total social spending in 2017 was directed to pensions²³ and 26% towards sickness and disability, leaving little room (barely 1.5% of total social spending) for effective and targeted social support policies that

23 The pensions spending was 15% of GDP in 2019.

empower people to cope with difficult situations (OECD, 2021; Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2019).

On the other hand, the humanitarian assistance system (cash assistance and additional social services such as housing, social care or healthcare) is funded by the European Commission. Until recently, both cash assistance and housing were administered by the UNHCR, in partnership with international and national NGOs and provided only for a very short period ('transition period') to cover basic needs. The viability of humanitarian assistance is provisional; it can change over time depending on available funds and the influx of people in need.

A recent development is the transfer of responsibility for the cash humanitarian assistance from UNHCR and the Cash Alliance to the Greek state. This provides in principle a degree of alignment, which could become more effective through genuine dialogue and public consultation with all stakeholders involved. As another key informant pointed out, a typical example of the transfer of accommodation responsibility from the organisations to the state authorities is the ESTIA programme, which was operated by the UNHCR for 4–5 years and as from June 2021 has been fully taken over by the Ministry of Migration and Asylum:

It is interesting how a programme that started as humanitarian aid, in the process becomes part of the state benefits system. Once the legislation enters into defining who the beneficiaries are, we are not talking only about humanitarian aid, but about something different.

According to the stakeholder, the reason UNHCR supports the transition is to ensure that the

Greek state will provide asylum seekers with the minimum benefits and protection as defined by European Directives and to see the assistance properly institutionalised.

For another key informant, the distinction between humanitarian assistance and social protection boils down essentially to which funding mechanism supports each system. In principle, access to healthcare and public hospitals, subsidised housing and schooling all constitute fundamental rights of social protection.

For their part, recipients of social assistance from the host population point out that the benefits are very important: 'a relief' and 'the only regular and stable source of income', for the economic survival of households. Social protection benefits are targeted towards the specific needs for which they are provided and are indispensable, especially for families with children, 'provided someone has a job, even occasionally'. As they point out, 'allowances can greatly increase a family's income and that is why everyone is trying to get it. Not everyone receives the same, but they collect enough. ... Without these supplements it would be difficult to survive or support the family, maintaining an adequate standard of living.'

Access to social protection benefits and social services is not restricted by law to the Greek nationals but is addressed to all vulnerable people within Greek territory who fulfil certain eligibility criteria. Asylum seekers are not eligible for any of the national social benefits, but once they acquire the status of recognised refugees, they have, in theory, the same rights to social protection benefits as the Greek citizens.

However, because of the limited social protection financial resources and the increasing number

of people in need of social protection over time, inclusion/eligibility criteria are quite hard to meet even for natives, let alone for the displaced.

Specifically, to qualify for social benefits (minimum guaranteed income, child benefit, rent subsidy, disability benefit, etc.), recognised refugees are required to have: a valid residence permit (often requiring five years at least of legal residence in Greece, certified by the submission of a tax declaration), a social insurance number (AMKA or PAAYPA), a tax registration number (AFM), and a bank account. As the vast majority of refugees do not have a job in the formal labour market (Bagavos et al., 2021; Kapsalis et al., 2021; Skleparis, 2018), and cannot set up their own business, they face huge difficulties in meeting the above requirements and are thus effectively excluded from the system. Moreover, bureaucratic procedures can be daunting: ‘it is a constant fight to have AMKA, AFM, it is often difficult to open a bank account, to create your own business’, one refugee pointed out.

Recognised refugees have the same rights as Greek impoverished persons regarding access to free healthcare and coverage of health-related expenses in case of a serious health problem, as well as of burial expenses, should the need emerge. However, in practice, very few recognised refugees are aware of these rights and how to navigate the complex bureaucratic procedures of the system. Very often they fall victim to extensive misinformation dispersed from various sources, including from their own communities, as several interviewees pointed out.

A key finding that emerges from the interviews with key informants is that the difficulty of recognised refugees accessing the national social

protection system is not the outcome of limited resources but rather the lack of political will in the central administration to make refugees an integral part of the national social protection system. As a local government key informant pointed out, the budget ascribed to the MGI scheme contains the resources to cover twice as many beneficiaries as it currently does (273,000 vulnerable households), so it could easily be extended to recognised refugees as well.

However, this issue is not on the government agenda, which is primarily focused on minimising the number of new arrivals and making Greece a less attractive destination for asylum seekers, as the Minister of Migration and Asylum has often publicly explained (Reuters, 2021; Sofokleousin, 2021; Kathimerini, 2021b; Imerisia, 2021; Proto Thema, 2021).²⁴ This approach is part of a balancing act with the official commitment of the government to comply with international law and European legislation as well as its need to appease the concerns raised by EU authorities and human rights organisations regarding the treatment of asylum seekers and refugees.

It appears that the tendency to complicate access to the national welfare system to non-nationals reflects the implicit assumption that access to the social protection system is primarily designed, addressed and perceived (by competent public authorities as well as Greek society) as an exclusive entitlement of Greeks, because of their national ties to the state.

4.3 Important factors which influenced the current approach

The national social protection system in Greece had no previous experience of addressing the needs of the migrant population, which only

²⁴ Also see the Migration Minister on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/nmitarakis/status/1300456544811843586> (in Greek).

started growing in the early 1990s, let alone the emergency needs of the massive displaced populations that arrived in 2015–2016. That is why the Greek authorities, at the peak of the refugee crisis in 2015, called upon experienced international agencies like UNHCR, IOM and the International Red Cross Federation to step in and set up a humanitarian assistance programme, funded by the EU and managed by these agencies (UNHCR, 2019b). As a key informant from one of these international organisations said: ‘a State cannot function on its own when there are neither the funds, nor the people and the ability to find the space (to accommodate the refugees). ...You have a state body that manages as much as it can, and a mechanism under its control which consists of NGOs, organisations, local communities, and regions. This is how you achieve maximum efficiency. It is quite difficult to fully cover all target groups at all times, whether it has to do with asylum seekers or with recognised refugees’.

The humanitarian system established in 2015–2016 can be attributed to the emergency that had to be addressed and the involvement of organisations which possessed the expertise, albeit from totally different contexts (e.g., camps for the Palestinians in Lebanon). Traditionally, one of the roles of NGOs engaged in humanitarian assistance has been to cover the gaps in the state’s protection of refugees by disseminating best practices, training public servants and enhancing the capacity of the state to cope once the other organisations have withdrawn. Over the course of time, the Greek state, with the help of humanitarian and global organisations, created the appropriate infrastructures and built the necessary mechanisms for the support of the refugee population.

An interesting point made by a key informant from an international NGO is that over the past

few years, there has been growing pressure on Greek authorities from the EU to move away from reception policies and towards integration policies on the grounds that the emergency funding given through humanitarian assistance cannot be properly controlled and scrutinised. On the other hand, for exactly the same reasons, Greek governments, irrespective of political orientation, have preferred to stick to the reception policies, because – as emergency measures – these are not strictly monitored, and they provide cash through faster and easier procedures in order to build infrastructure and provide food and shelter for the displaced populations without having to go through the normal lengthy and bureaucratic procurement procedures.

All this goes hand in hand with the subtle pressure put on Greece to keep the displaced populations in the country, rather than allow them to continue their journey to Europe. This, of course, conflicts with the implicit strategy pursued by the Greek authorities to keep the numbers of refugees that will remain in the country low, given hostile public opinion (European Commission, 2018; DiaNEOsis 2020) and an unfavourable economic environment (Lekakis and Kousis, 2013; Mavridis, 2018; Papatzani et al., 2021). The underlying attitude being, as a key informant from a national NGO pointed out, that ‘the less you give them, the more likely it is for them to leave’. As already argued, and in order to deter more refugees and migrants from entering Greece, the Greek state is eager not to appear ‘too friendly’ to the displaced, so that Greece will stop being a destination country for refugees. As a key informant pointed out, this is one of the reasons why, in the name of security, it has tightened controls over the sea and land borders, thus considerably reducing refugee flows over the past 18 months (Cortinovis, 2021, Oxfam and Greek Council for Refugees, 2020; ECRE, 2021b; InfoMigrants, 2021).

The Greek state is not alone in this approach. More and more EU governments are reluctant, if not outright refusing to accept more (or any) displaced populations or support their integration.²⁵ This situation nurtures a climate of insecurity and leads the displaced to inactivity and unwillingness to integrate into the Greek society. As several key

informants from international NGOs pointed out: ‘their perspective will change if they have the freedom to decide on what to do from the beginning, at a very early stage of their arrival, and if they are empowered to develop their skills and to more actively engage in their self-reliance and integration into Greek society’.

25 In the spring of 2021, Denmark became the first European country to revoke residence status for more than 200 Syrian refugees, thus facing condemnation from EU lawmakers, the UNHCR and human rights groups (Murray, 2021). More recently, 12 EU countries openly suggested in a letter to the Vice-President of the European Commission and the Commissioner for Home Affairs that the EU should fund their countries to build walls to prevent illegal migration (Follain, 2021).

5 Outcomes of the current approach for affected communities

5.1 Evidence of outcomes of assistance

In analysing these findings, it should be kept in mind that the survey was conducted in only two locations and sampling was not fully random within these two locations, meaning the quantitative data are not locally or nationally representative of the study groups. Moreover, the host population sample was collected with a quota of approximately 50% transfer recipients, hence the findings should not be seen to represent the Greece, Athens or Ioannina host populations more broadly.

5.1.1 Basic needs and well-being

As already discussed, applicants for international protection are granted accommodation through a number of routes, while beneficiaries of international protection, with the exception of those participating in the HELIOS programme, are expected to find and pay for accommodation on their own. The quality of assistance provided greatly depends on whether individuals live in apartments or in accommodation camps. In our survey sample, almost half of the asylum seekers (49%) live in the camps or other type of dwelling,²⁶ whereas six out of ten refugees (62%) live in apartments.²⁷ In addition, asylum seekers are more likely to live in shared dwellings (70%) compared to refugees (45%).

According to findings from the qualitative research, those living in apartments usually enjoy better living conditions and greater privacy, while those living in camps live in crowded structures, often quite far from the cities, in containers or tents. These living spaces are usually isolated and socially marginal, which according to research on the topic worsens human suffering (Kandylis, 2019). Furthermore, as Hailey (2009) identifies, these camps become permanent – a space of ‘permanent temporality’. In the case of the camp in Katsikas in Ioannina, families live in an ISOBOX container, with toilet, kitchen and an air-conditioning unit.²⁸ Single mothers have to share the container with another family. Residents complain that there are not enough facilities provided in the camp and that there is no access to basic services, including the internet for over a year now, which makes it very difficult for them to communicate or attend online classes.

Additionally, individuals (and families) who entered the country from the land border with Turkey (Evros) without first registering at a RIC, and then made their way to the mainland, have trouble in applying for asylum, and therefore in receiving cash assistance, having not gone through the standard procedure of registration and identification.

26 The difference between refugees (33%) and asylum seekers concerning other dwelling type is statistically significant, since $p < 0.001$. See Table 9 in the Annex for details.

27 The difference between refugees and asylum seekers (38%) concerning apartment accommodation is statistically significant, since $p < 0.001$.

28 ISOBOX containers are prefabricated accommodation units installed in the accommodation structures (camps). Their size varies. They usually host one or two families.

Similarly, those who leave the accommodation sites at their own initiative because of long delays in the process are also left out. The number of these ‘invisible’ refugees is unknown. Some of them somehow manage to cover their basic needs, while others are homeless and often experience harmful living conditions or engage in illicit activity in order to survive. As a key informant from a national NGO put it:

All these people who are on the move or who do not know whether they shall/can stay in Greece or do not wish to stay in the country, until their departure, if they succeed, find themselves outside the social assistance system. Because of this they remain extremely vulnerable to all kinds of exploitation networks.

Well-being is dependent on the type of benefits that individuals receive. While asylum seekers receive both cash assistance and accommodation through the humanitarian assistance system, recognised refugees are excluded from these provisions. In principle, they are eligible to a number of state social benefits provided by the Greek state. **However, one of the key findings of the quantitative survey in Greece is the negligible proportion of the refugee population that is aware of these benefits and who successfully overcome the bureaucratic and other obstacles in order to access the social protection system.** Out of 310 refugees interviewed in Attiki and Ioannina regions, only two individuals were receiving any form of state benefit – in their case, both were receiving unemployment benefit (Figure 2). This clearly illustrates the enormous barriers that recognised refugees face in accessing state social benefits.

Figure 2 Refugee Recipients of social protection benefits



As illustrated by the quantitative survey findings, both refugees and asylum seekers regard the assistance they receive (either cash or in kind) as very important or indispensable to their well-being. 76% of asylum seekers regard cash benefits as important or very important, while 23% regard them as indispensable

for the household.²⁹ Regarding benefits in kind (ESTIA and HELIOS accommodation), 75% of refugees and 33% of asylum seekers regard them as indispensable.

Further, in relation to wellbeing, both groups experience significant negative emotional outcomes. Asked about how often they have felt nervous and

²⁹ 55% of refugees consider cash benefits as indispensable and the difference is statistically significant, since $p=0.001$. See Table 10 in the Annex for details.

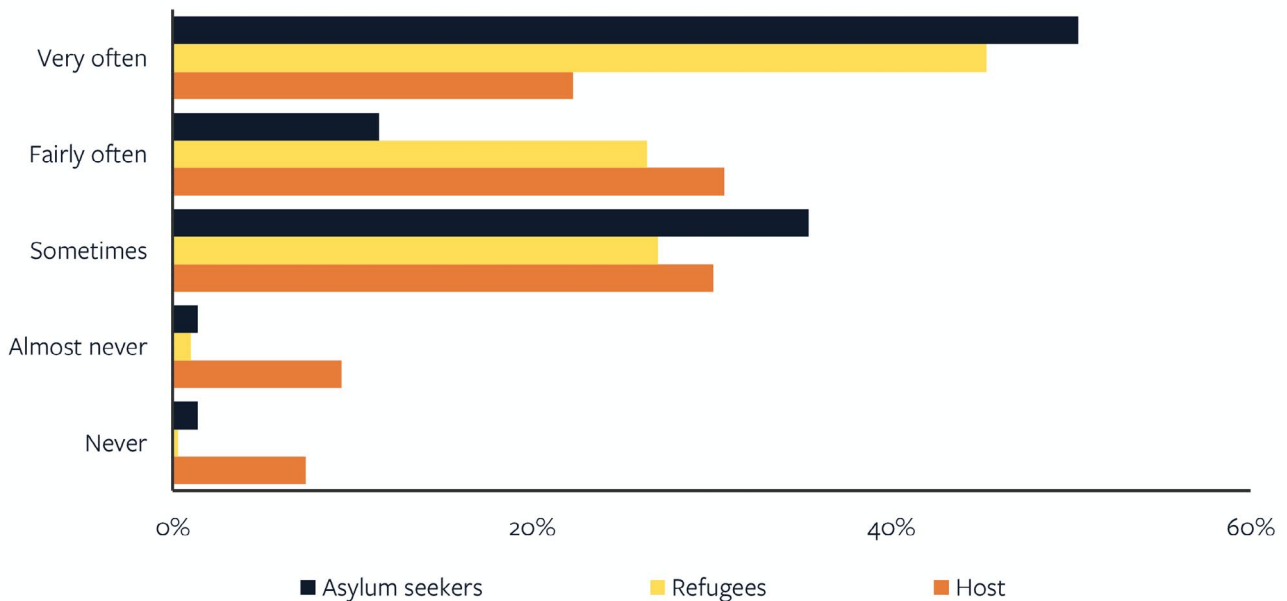
stressed over the previous month, 72% of refugees and 62% of asylum seekers³⁰ replied ‘very often’ or ‘fairly often’ (Figure 3). As a young Afghan asylum seeker from the qualitative research put it: ‘from the moment I put my head on the pillow, I start thinking and the thoughts start moving around my mind’. He has no one to talk to, because his friends have their own problems and he does not want to burden them, nor does he want them to feel pity for him. Many of the displaced we interviewed had indications of a range of mental health problems, including

serious ones, such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, anxiety and depression, which remain largely untreated.

In addition, survey findings indicate that the respondents believe they have lost control of their fate and feel uncertainty about their future.

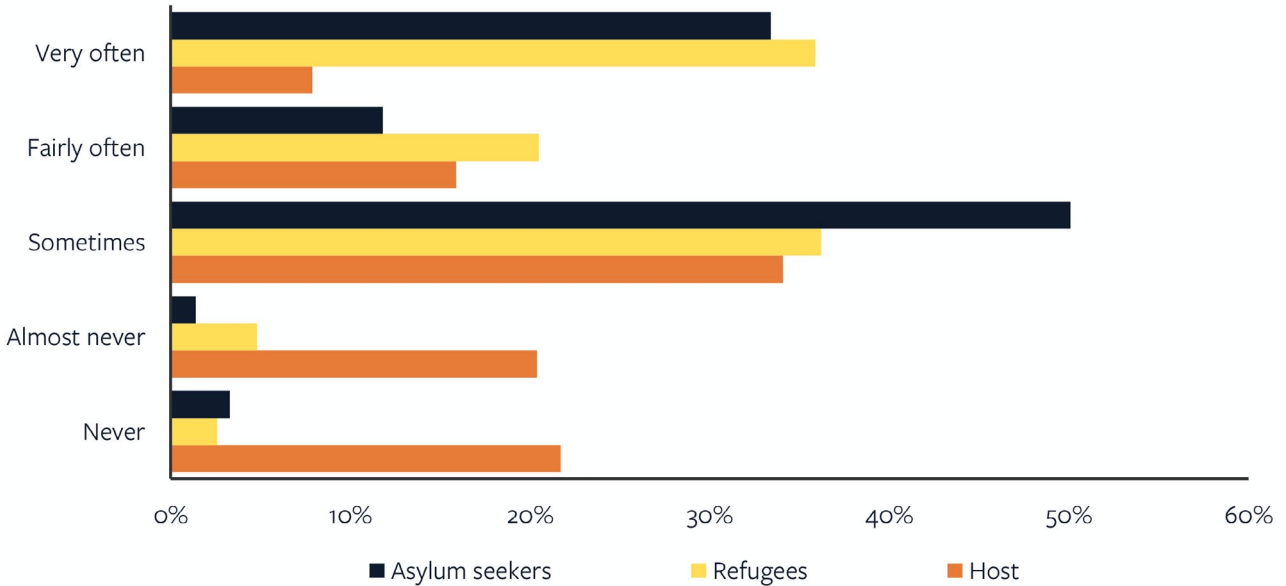
More than half of refugees (56%) felt fairly often or very often that they were unable to control the important things in their life, compared to 45% of asylum seekers³¹ (Figure 3).

Figure 3 In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and stressed?



30 The aforementioned difference between refugees and asylum seekers concerning inability to control their fate is statistically significant, since $p=0.008$. See Table 9 in the Annex for details.
 31 The aforementioned difference between refugees and asylum seekers concerning inability to control their fate is statistically significant, since $p=0.008$. See Table 9 in the Annex for details.

Figure 4 In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?

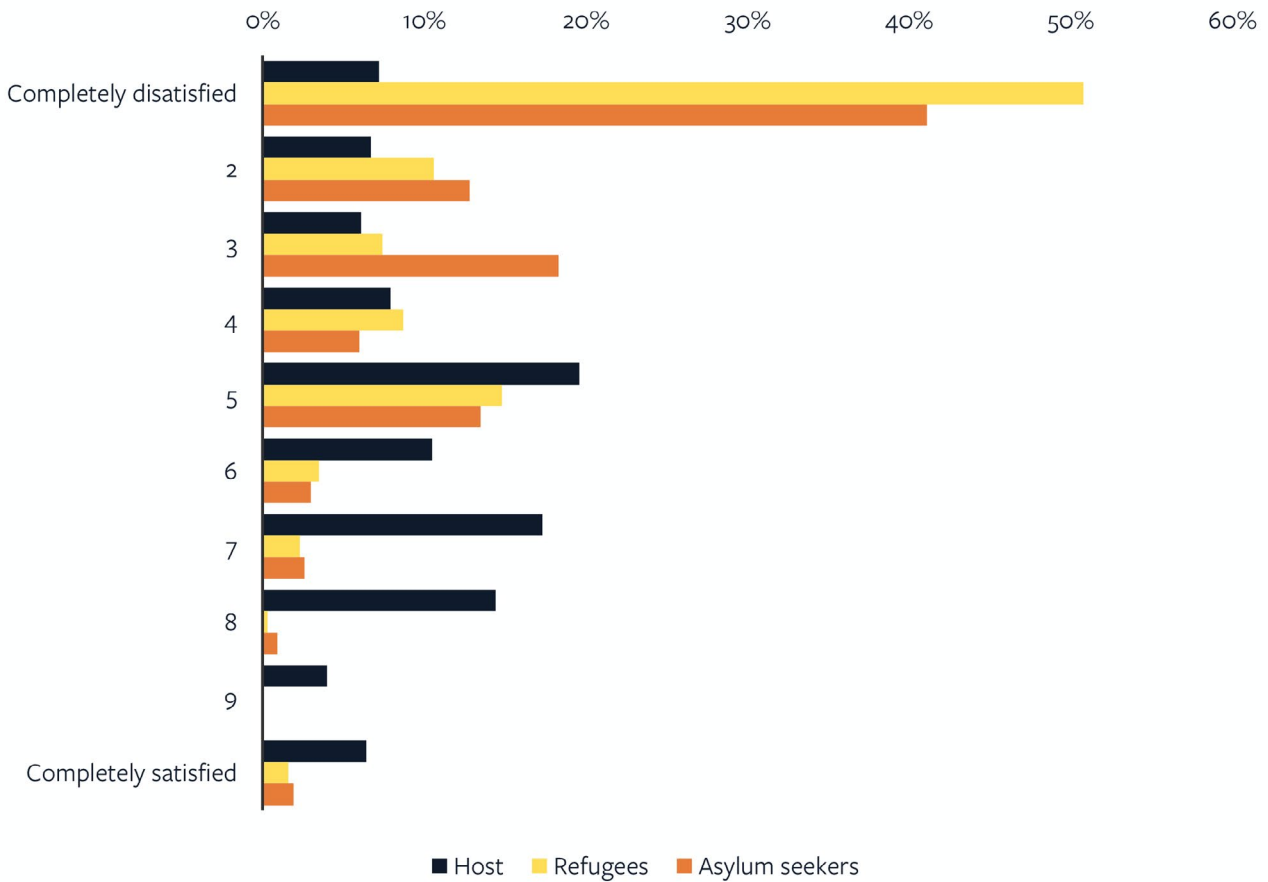


Given the living conditions described above, but more importantly, their anxiety, their sense of lack of control over their life and uncertainty about their future, both asylum seekers and refugees perceive their own well-being as extremely low. As such, when asked ‘how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days’ on

a 10-point scale, an alarming share of refugees (51%) and of asylum seekers (41%) answered ‘completely dissatisfied’³² (Figure 5). If we assume life satisfaction average scores, refugees and asylum seekers score 2.6 and 2.7 respectively, while hosts score significantly higher (5.7) than both of them.

32 The aforementioned difference between refugees and asylum seekers concerning being completely dissatisfied from life is statistically significant, since $p=0.026$. See Table 9 in the Annex for details.

Figure 5 How satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days?



The above findings highlight the uncertainty that recognised refugees feel in Greece. Theoretically, once they receive a positive decision in their asylum application, their level of uncertainty and stress should begin to decline, and their level of satisfaction about life and feeling of control over their life should start to improve. Yet, the exact opposite is happening.

In addition to the above, there was also a lot of pressure on the refugees during the long lockdown, because they were not allowed to leave the camp due to the public health restrictions.

In order to further analyse the potential contribution of assistance to well-being, we assumed as dependent variables in the regression

analysis the following six dimensions of wellbeing: life satisfaction, financial satisfaction, assets, insecurity and two aspects of mental health: ‘stressed last month’ and ‘unable to control last month’. High values on the insecurity index and aspects of mental health lead to lower well-being, while the opposite occurs for the remaining dimensions. For each dimension of wellbeing, two regression models were estimated: the first one assumes ‘refugee/asylum seeker non-recipients’ as the reference category and ‘host-non-recipients’, ‘refugee/ asylum seekers recipients’ and ‘host recipients’ as the categories that will be compared with the reference category, while the second one includes the aforementioned respondent and household sociodemographic characteristics as control variables. The most interesting

comparison is the one that compares: ‘refugees/asylum seekers recipients vs non-recipients’. ‘Refugee/asylum seekers recipients’ differ significantly from ‘Refugee/asylum seekers non-recipients’ for most dimensions of well-being. More specifically, they score significantly higher in life satisfaction and financial satisfaction and less in the food insecurity index and ‘unable to control’ than ‘refugees/asylum seekers non-recipients’ (see model A in Table 13 in the Annex). Host recipients and non-recipients also differ significantly from ‘refugees/asylum seekers non-recipients’ for most of well-being dimensions.

It is quite striking that the significant effect of ‘refugee/asylum seeker recipient’ remains in the second model despite the inclusion of control variables, indicating that being a ‘refugee/asylum seeker recipient’ has a direct impact on the dimensions of well-being. So, it appears that there may be a cause–effect relationship between well-being and the status of ‘refugee/asylum seeker recipient’. The control variable that has a positive significant effect on most of the well-being dimensions is the ‘paid employment’, while ethnic origin has a negative effect on most well-being dimensions, with Arab-speaking respondents being in a worse position than Afghans concerning their well-being.

Overall, the way the two systems of humanitarian and social protection work has a negative impact on the well-being of the people it is supposed to help. As regards asylum seekers, the humanitarian assistance system leads to their marginalisation and ghettoisation in accommodation structures and camps, often located at a significant distance from the nearest city, with poor living conditions;

on the other hand, the de facto exclusion of recognised refugees from the national social protection system leads to the deepening of poverty and social exclusion of those who move from the status of ‘asylum seeker’ to that of ‘recognised refugee’. As a result, asylum seekers and recognised refugees cannot make long-term plans for staying in Greece and integrating into Greek society. They are not given adequate opportunities for a decent living or the tools to improve their financial position to pursue longer-term goals. For the majority of the displaced, especially for the recognised refugees, the living conditions are so bad that they can only focus on receiving their travel documents and moving to other European countries.

5.1.2 Social cohesion and social interaction between and among the communities

During the early years of the refugee crisis, Greek society was more receptive towards refugees, but this attitude has changed over the past 2–3 years. According to Eurobarometer surveys, in the autumn of 2015 an absolute majority of 85% of Greek people believed that Greece should help refugees, when the EU average was 65%. During the following years the Greek share has decreased (to 69% in summer 2020) but is still slightly higher than the European average (66%).³³

Against the background of economic crisis, the scarcity of social assistance resources and a growing number of people in need, it is apparent a certain number of people in Greece started feeling anger and antagonism towards the displaced population. This feeling is also nurtured

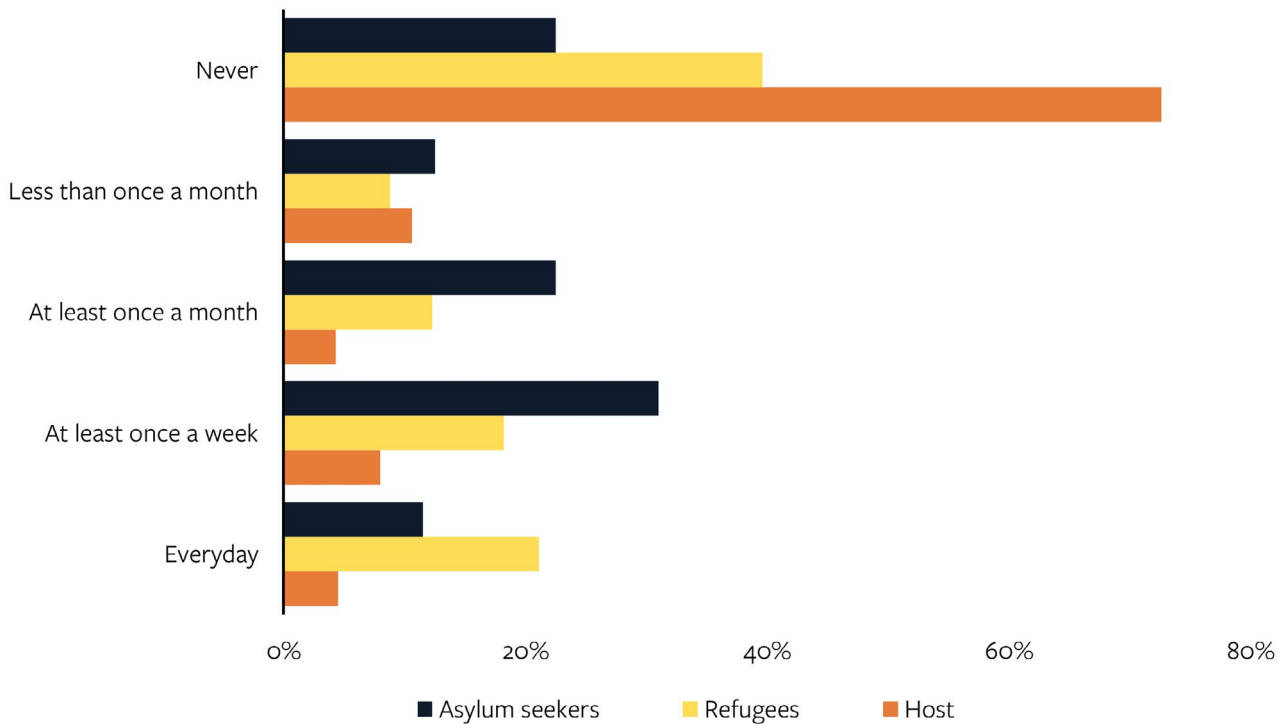
³³ See Standard Eurobarometer surveys 84–93 available at Eurobarometer (europa.eu).

by prejudice and the fear of foreigners or of the ‘other’ which is prevalent in part of Greek society (Kountouri, 2009; Triandafyllidou, 1998; Triandafyllidou, 2000).

Within this context, interaction between the two communities remains limited. As such, 73% of the host population in our survey sample say that they never interact with members of the displaced community (Figure 6). On the other hand, 21% of refugees and 12% of asylum seekers report that they interact with the host population daily.³⁴

Two important findings are that 40% of surveyed refugees never interact with members of the host community, suggestive of their marginalisation and exclusion; and those who live in the camps report extremely limited interaction with the host population: 48% of refugees and 30% of asylum seekers never interact with the host community, underlining the negative impact that accommodation in the camps (as opposed to city apartments) has on the integration of this population.

Figure 6 How frequently do you personally interact with members of the other community?



Members of the host population also believe that a large share of the host population either never interacts with the displaced population (44%), or

that they have only limited social interaction (39%). On the other hand, however, almost one in three (31%) of the host community has provided help

34 (p=0.001). See Table 11 in the Annex for detailed survey findings for this section.

to someone from the displaced community in the past six months, a percentage which is higher in Ioannina (37%) than in Athens (25%) (see Table 11 in Annex 1).

Social interaction between the two communities, however, has many layers. In particular, the host community benefits from the presence of asylum seekers and refugees that receive humanitarian assistance, as many households rent their apartments to asylum seekers under the ESTIA accommodation scheme, small traders sell them their products, and the cash assistance programme generates income for the local community. The use of cash cards also contributes to some extent to the communication and interaction between the populations, since the autonomy the displaced have in spending the money in the local market facilitates their visibility in the local economy (UNHCR, 2021c). If the humanitarian assistance programme was to be discontinued, many people from the host community would lose income.

On the other hand, there is also prejudice and fear of foreigners. Some resentment on the part of the host population was also expressed in relation to what they consider as discriminatory practices in favour of asylum seekers, like for example the full payment of rent and utility bills for the displaced but not for those who are unemployed among the host population. The general attitude of our interlocutors from the host population is that the displaced should not receive the same benefits as the natives or even other immigrants because:

They do not need extra help when they have a house and food. ...Let them find a job, we do the same, anyway they are here only for a little while, for this period the state helps them.

In their view, for the displaced to receive social protection benefits they must fulfil the same criteria required for the host population, namely Greek citizenship, permanent residence in the country and contribution to the Greek economy.

It takes time for them to become Greek citizens and contribute to the country. ...We cannot have equal rights with refugees automatically. Legally this cannot be done. (They need) to learn to love Greece, which offers them food and not send (the allowances) back to their countries. They have to meet some criteria, like me, to receive the allowances.

Furthermore, our interlocutors of migrant origin who came to Greece as economic migrants and have now lived there for many years maintain that the displaced populations should not receive social protection benefits if they have not decided to stay permanently in Greece.

It is not like us, who came to Greece to find a job and work. They just want to travel through Greece and go to other countries that provide more benefits and where they can find a job more easily.

Given that assistance resources (financial and human resources as well as social assistance services and structures) are scarce and that the vulnerable persons or groups in need (host or displaced) are growing in number, a certain part of the host population (natives or migrants) feels anger and/or antagonism towards the displaced: 46% of the host community in our survey say that there is a lot of competition for public services between Greeks, refugees and asylum seekers (Table 11 in the Annex).

Another interesting finding has to do with the perceived antagonism for social resources for the most vulnerable among each group. Among the host population, while 76% agree or strongly agree that vulnerable from the displaced community should receive support, 55% say that vulnerable from the displaced community receive more support than vulnerable Greeks (Table 11 in the Annex). Comparable attitudes are observed among the displaced community. While 90% agree or strongly agree with the statement that vulnerable people from the host community should receive support, 62% say that vulnerable people from the host community receive more support than vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers.

To further analyse the potential contribution of assistance to social cohesion, we assumed as dependent variables in the regression analysis the following nine aspects of social cohesion: personal interaction with other community; general interaction with other community; general social cohesion; trust in national government; trust in local government; trust in international organisations, general trust; help received from other community; and help provided by other community. High values of all variables lead to high social cohesion, while help dimensions are binary. For each dimension of social cohesion, two regression models were estimated: the first one assumes 'refugee/asylum seeker non-recipients' as the reference category and 'host-non-recipients', 'refugee/asylum seeker recipients' and 'host recipients' as the categories to be compared with the reference category, while the second one includes the aforementioned as well as respondent and household socio-demographic characteristics as control variables. The most important research question concerns the difference between: 'refugees/asylum seekers: recipients vs non-recipients'.

The results do not seem to have as clear a pattern as the one discussed for well-being. 'Refugee/asylum seekers recipients' trust 'international organisations' more than non-recipients do. This seems to be the most robust result, since some significant differences disappear in model B, after the inclusion of controls. On the other hand, there are a lot of differences between host community and 'refugee/asylum seeker non-recipients'. Members of the host community have less personal interaction with refugees and asylum seekers and score higher in general social cohesion index, but lower in trust in the local government and generic trust. They also present higher probability to provide help to other community (Table 14 in the Annex). The controls that have the most significant effect on most of social cohesion aspects are 'region', then 'paid employment' and age group 30–49. Respondents from Ioannina believe to a greater degree that there is a higher general interaction with the other community than those from Athens; however, they interact with the other community less frequently than those in Athens. They also trust international organisations more, have more generic trust than Athenians but present higher levels of social cohesion. They present higher probabilities for providing help and receiving help than respondents from Athens.

However, despite the differences in culture and the reservations of the local communities, there are no widespread tensions with the refugees, except for some incidents which mostly took place at the peak of the xenophobic rhetoric and activism of the (now dissolved) ultra-right Golden Dawn party. Therefore, even though refugees and asylum seekers feel discriminated by the host community (46%), a feeling significantly more prevalent among Afghanis (72%) than Syrians (18%), both the displaced population and the host population agree with the statement that the

refugee community and host community have good relations (42% of the host community, 48% of the displaced population) (table 11 in the Annex).

5.1.3 Economic agency

Both asylum seekers and recognised refugees highlighted their dire financial situation, with the latter being in an even worse situation than the former. As already pointed out, applicants for international protection stop receiving financial assistance as soon as they receive a positive decision on their asylum application. They also lose access to accommodation within a month of being granted asylum. Therefore, they need to find and pay for accommodation at a time when they lack financial resources.

Estimates among key informants as to whether the amount of cash assistance is adequate for the asylum seekers vary. Some argue that the amount is enough to ensure their basic needs, while others disagree. For their part, the majority of asylum seekers, whether accommodated in camps or ESTIA apartments or self-accommodated, consider the amount of cash assistance as inadequate to cover their basic needs. In their own words: ‘It is just enough so that you do not die... it is poverty’, and, ‘From the 20th of each month, I do not have a cent in my pocket. The money is enough just to keep us alive’.

Although recipients of humanitarian assistance are provided with accommodation and cash assistance, they still need an extra income to be able to buy more and better food, shoes and clothes, medicines, diapers for those with babies, an internet card, and so on. Especially in the case of large families, poverty is so acute that some have to share one pair of shoes between them.

As a result, people have to find other ways to supplement their income. Some work in casual and uninsured jobs in the informal sector (mostly agriculture and a few in construction) or in low-paid formal jobs (if they succeed in opening a bank account). However, legal income-generating activities are very rare. Some resort to illegal ways of gaining income: ‘if someone can’t find a lawful job, he will have to work illegally, because he and his family have to survive’. It is not surprising that there are many cases of people who are prepared to put themselves or their family members at risk by engaging in illegal dealings and illegal processes. Most would accept any job just to earn some money: ‘it doesn’t matter what I do, I need to feed my family’. This poses the risk of labour exploitation (UNHCR, 2019).

An indication of the extremely limited job opportunities for the displaced can be found in the survey findings, where only 4% of the displaced population (the same percentage for both asylum seekers and refugees) are employed. Of that population, 60% receive payment in cash, while the remaining 40% receive payment in kind (see Table 12 in the Annex). It is noteworthy that 43% had a written contract while 57% only had an oral agreement. The situation is even worse in the household level, where only 0.5% said that another household member has any form of paid employment.

Non-withstanding the legal barriers, the difficulty in accessing the formal labour market is not unrelated to the low educational qualifications of the majority of the displaced. According to our survey findings, 45% have not received any education, while 31% have attended secondary or higher education (see Table 2).

As a result of their limited financial resources, most of the displaced population live in poverty and their economic agency is extremely limited.

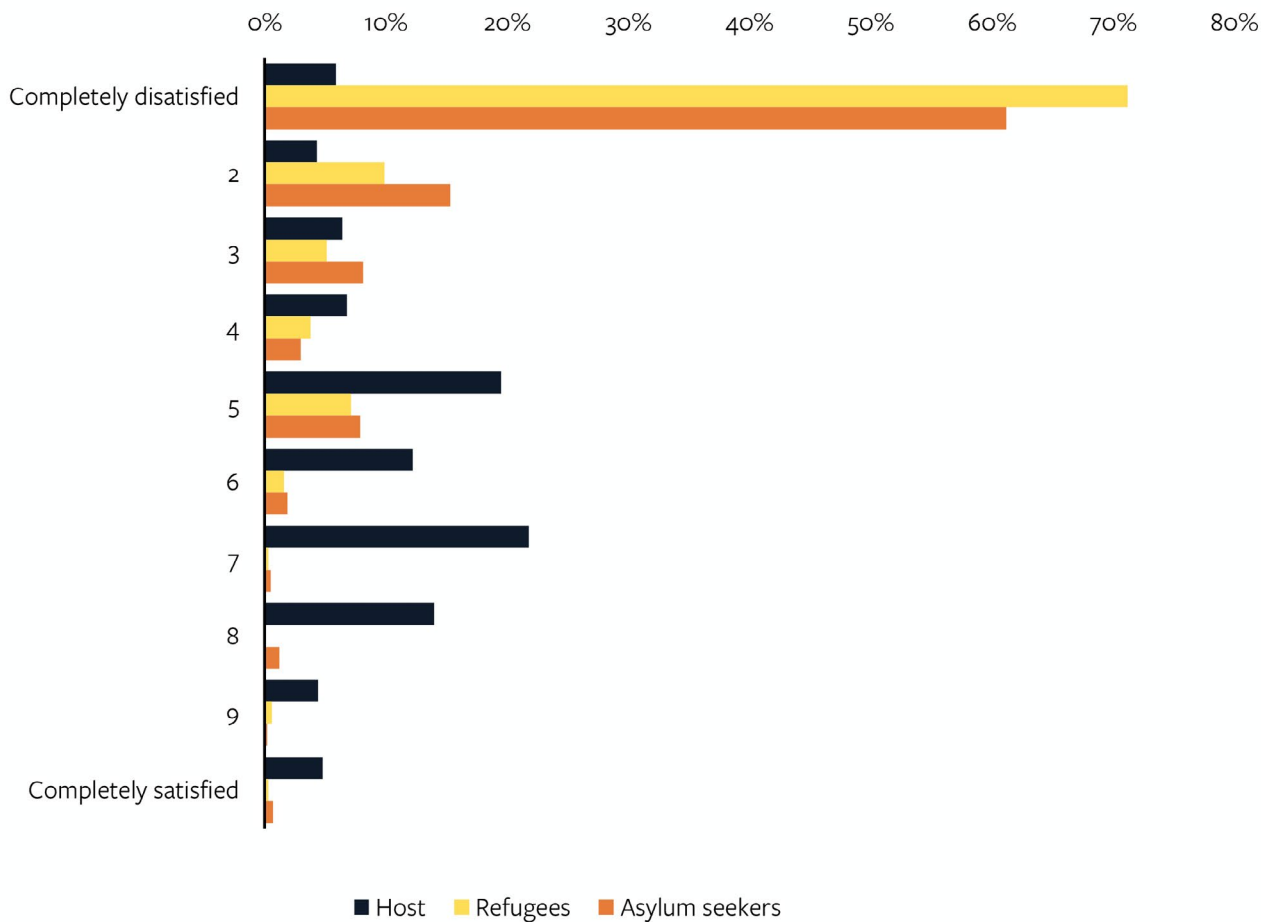
That often leads them to borrow money to cover their needs. It is not surprising that 73% have borrowed money in the past 12 months from family, relatives or friends (see Table 12 in the Annex). More than 38% have received remittances from other countries over the past year, as did 10% of asylum seekers. Interestingly, only 2% of refugees and asylum seekers have sent money abroad, while 2% have both sent and received, challenging the myth that refugees and asylum seekers are exploiting the local social protection system and sending remittances abroad (see Table 12).

Lack of access of asylum seekers to the formal labour market signifies a loss of human capital, while condemning working-age people into inertia and apathy. As a key informant from a local government organisation noted, ‘they walk around the camp all day and all night’, with no activities whatsoever to keep them busy. As an Afghan asylum seeker living in the camp of Katsikas pointed out:

They should keep the [asylum seekers] busy with activities, use them in various tasks, not just let them stay and sleep inside the camp. [Asylum seekers] are qualified, with great diversity of skills and experience, because they were employed in their home country. The schedule inside the camp is to do nothing, only eat and sleep. That is why we have mental health problems, and we lose our confidence and self-esteem.

Both asylum seekers and refugees view their financial situation as very bleak. As shown from the quantitative survey, 81% refugees and 77% of asylum seekers were completely or almost completely dissatisfied with the financial situation of their household (the two least favourable options on a 10-point scale question) (Figure 7). If we assume financial satisfaction average scores, refugees and asylum seekers score 1.8 and 2.0 respectively, while hosts score significantly higher (5.8) than both (Table 9 in the Annex).

Figure 7 How satisfied are you with the financial situation of your household?



Bank accounts for applicants and beneficiaries of international protection are another important factor, since it is often a prerequisite for formal employment. Based on the findings from the quantitative survey, we observe an opposing picture for asylum seekers and refugees. While 70% of refugees have a bank account, only 32% of asylum seekers do.³⁵ The latter might be attributed to uncertainty around having a future in the country, and asylum seekers may view a bank account as an unnecessary step, particularly given the bureaucratic difficulties it entails. In addition, it may be attributed to the informal type of employment via oral contracts, as well as receiving payment in cash or in kind.

Summarising, access to paid employment in the formal sector of the economy is not only decisive in increasing the economic agency of refugees but is also a prerequisite for full access to contributory social security services such as healthcare, sickness benefit, unemployment benefit, pension, maternity benefits, parental leave and disability benefits (European Commission, 2021b). Employment opportunities for refugees would be significantly boosted if they could have their skills and qualifications accredited. Even though the accreditation procedure in Greece is in theory open to refugees, the thresholds are in practice unobtainable for this population. In most cases, refugees do not have diplomas or degrees with

35 Statistical significant result, since $p < 0.001$, see Table 12 in the Annex

them when they travel, and they cannot obtain documents from their country of origin or legalise them at the consular authorities of their country. Therefore, they do not even meet the threshold for entering the accreditation procedure of the Hellenic National Academic Recognition and Information Center. A possible alternative could be the European Qualification Passport for Refugees,³⁶ yet only a handful among this population have obtained one.

5.2 Contribution of the current approach to these outcomes

5.2.1 Impact of the current approach

As the majority of key informants and refugees have pointed out, the humanitarian assistance provided to the displaced is limited in its content and duration and cannot adequately cover their living expenses and support their integration. Additionally, key informants from frontline NGOs dealing with refugees argue that the system encourages the ‘institutionalisation’ of the displaced populations and a sense of ‘fatalism’ that can breed apathy and dependence (see Frangiskou et al., 2020).

To increase autonomy and enhance economic agency, refugees and asylum seekers need to become self-reliant and acquire the necessary resources to support themselves and integrate into society. Integration is about much more than handing out allowances; it is about access to the labour market, to education and training and to empowerment.

An NGO respondent pointed out that humanitarian assistance in Greece offers only ‘symptomatic treatment’, focusing on providing temporary support rather than investing in the

long-term social integration of the displaced population (‘they want to save them from fire’). The focus and duration of further support services largely depend on EU projects funded by AMIF. ‘The aim of these projects is to manage a population that is not welcome, but we must take care of them anyway because we are obliged to by the international treaties, however there is no effort to support their long-term social and economic integration’.

Furthermore, humanitarian assistance is ‘an emergency-oriented response’, which is the opposite of what the social protection system is perceived to be. There is a tendency towards the ‘here and now’: ‘both systems do not assist individuals in the long-run, they don’t equip them to stand on their own feet, to not depend on the provision of allowances, supporting their fundamental and true integration’.

As a key informant put it, this approach also reflects the ‘Greek mentality’: ‘to react to emergencies, instead of investing in long-term meaningful solutions’. However, as the interviewee points out, this was not always the approach:

Previously (i.e., before 2015), there was a slow process of recognition for the refugees, when people had the time to tell their stories, while taking the time to equip themselves with integration tools. Now that the recognition process is faster, we have people being awarded the same rights and obligations as the native population, but they don’t speak the language, they are not informed about their rights and responsibilities, they do not understand the role system, and the system treats them as if they owe

³⁶ The EQPR does not automatically provide formal accreditation of qualifications; it is at the discretion of national authorities to accept it as such or not.

something or as if they do not possess any skills; as a result we see disruption, high levels of unemployment, while civil servants are often not educated about how to deal with the displaced and develop a superiority complex which produces defensive and aggressive behaviours, which in turn lead to discrimination and stereotyping, etc.

The national approach was described in the following way:

The way we deal with the situation in Greece is focused on numbers, on how to stop people from coming in, without a plan on how to offer long-term support to the people that are already here.

Despite the criticism addressed to the humanitarian assistance system, it is true that the co-existence of social protection and humanitarian assistance succeeded in securing the necessary resources to satisfy the emergency needs of the displaced population. As a key informant from an international organisation pointed out:

It is interesting because while the assistance started as a humanitarian aid program it did not stay that way; it was conceived in such a way together with the Government that when its management is finally fully handed over to it, it can cover the minimum benefits required by the European Directive, i.e. decent living conditions and the provision of financial assistance to meet the basic needs of asylum seekers until their application is processed and is either accepted or rejected.

A critical issue that has been identified concerns the period established for the transition from

the humanitarian assistance system to the social protection one. Thirty days are arguably not enough. In addition, the administrative progress of asylum cases from the positive asylum decision to the delivery of the documents to the beneficiaries usually takes more than a month. **This traps people in a grey zone between ‘asylum seeker’ status and the status of ‘recognised refugee’, and being neither they are left with no income, accommodation or other form of support.** The transition period is particularly difficult for the more vulnerable segments among the refugees, such as single mothers with infants, pregnant women or individuals with disabilities, health and mobility problems.

Although the existing approach takes into account the vulnerabilities of the various sub-groups (e.g., people with disabilities, large families, single mothers), the lack of connections between the systems means the current approach is insufficient. From the moment people are trapped in the grey zone, they face misery regardless of their vulnerability profile.

The co-existence of the two support systems indicates that thanks to their know-how and experience, humanitarian organisations have successfully contributed over the past years to the management of the refugee issue. The state has now taken over the management in a more organised and coordinated way, so as to avoid fragmentary actions. The advantages of the gradual transfer of the management of the humanitarian assistance programme from the international organisations to the state authorities is that the latter are now able to anticipate some of the difficulties and challenges in implementing the programme and have acquired experience in dealing with the issues, while still receiving external technical assistance.

On the other hand, key informants from national and international NGOs, as well as from the local governments' social solidarity sector, are concerned about the state's readiness to assume the responsibility of providing assistance to the displaced population, for the reasons underlined above. In particular, they note that the Greek state does not have the political will to devote the necessary human, administrative and financial resources to improve assistance to the displaced population, despite adequate funds being provided by the EU.

In addition, the challenges that still need to be addressed by the state authorities include the lack of flexibility in managing financial resources, bureaucratic procedures and inadequate staffing of their services. If these challenges are not adequately addressed, the displaced population risks being adversely affected by the transition from a smoothly running, flexible, predictable and less bureaucratic system to a 'heavier' one with many unresolved parameters.

5.2.3 Impact on the future prospects of the displaced

Humanitarian assistance is the 'starting point' for covering the first period reception needs in the host country, but it is not a step towards integration for the refugees. For those who would consider staying in Greece, having access to a paid job is a prerequisite for addressing all their other needs. 'How can anyone survive without a job? Here things are really tough. There are no opportunities for work in Greece, and this is why everyone is leaving'. If the Greek state wanted to benefit from the labour supply of the refugees, it could improve their access to the labour market in sectors where there is a labour shortage, yet so far, limited initiatives have been taken in this

direction. As has been well pointed out, it appears that refugee 'integration into the labour market will be a strictly personal affair, implemented in a precarious fashion and on the basis of undeclared terms, in particular in dirty, dangerous and demeaning jobs and in a limited number of sectors' (Kapsalis, 2021). Only interpreters and cultural mediators are in a better position, as they are recruited based on their language proficiency and are paid quite well.

Therefore, and given their bleak prospects in Greece, it is not surprising that most recognised refugees, especially those from Syria, want to leave the country once they have their travel documents issued.

Consequently, a clear drawback of the current approach on social protection and humanitarian assistance is manifested in the unwillingness of the majority of recognised refugees to stay in Greece permanently and to make an effort to integrate. Many asylum seekers and refugees tend to consider their stay in Greece as a temporary and rather unpleasant stage of their journey towards their final 'dream' destination (Karyotis et al., 2018; DiaNEOsis, 2020, UNHCR, 2016). This attitude emanates from their need to reconnect with their family members who have already established a life in other countries; very often, these relatives are those who support them financially by topping up their monthly cash allowance or during the painful 'gap' periods between the various stages of recognition. Another reason that asylum seekers and refugees are eager to leave the country as soon as they receive their travel documents is the harsh conditions they experience (including racism and discrimination), as well as the trauma they suffered during the initial stage of their settlement in the camps and in the islands: 'my dream is to

leave Greece. Of course, I have met good people here, however what stays with me forever are the harsh and cruel behaviour and racism of people on the island when I was pregnant’.

However, as some key informants from NGOs point out, displaced people who have realistic expectations concerning their migratory journey can actually achieve better life outcomes living in Greece. If they keep on dreaming of a ‘Europe’ outside Greece, they can be easily disappointed, either when arriving in the new country or after having spent some time there. The messages that some NGOs receive from displaced people moving to other countries are quite varied, and some of them would like to return to Greece.

Apart from the unwillingness of refugees to stay in Greece, of equal importance is the unwillingness of the Greek state to help them integrate (Nielsen, 2021). Refugees who might consider staying do not have any other option but to leave for other European countries.

As one key informant from an international organisation put it:

Personally, I get angry when I hear that, because if you do not provide them with some conditions to live with dignity, some rights and opportunities for a career or education, of course they will choose another country that will offer them the aforementioned.

As one refugee pointed out, to stay in the country, a person would wish for three things: information, education and work: ‘we prefer work than being assisted’.

The future outlook of refugees also depends significantly on their country of origin and on whether they want to integrate in Greece or not.

For example, Syrians, Iraqis and Iranians who have a higher level of education and travel with their families, have different plans from the Pakistanis and Afghans. Very few among the former want to remain in Greece and integrate here, while the latter perceive fewer alternatives. According to a key informant from an NGO in Ioannina, approximately 15–20% of Afghan and African refugees would have no problem staying in Greece, as opposed to Arab speaking refugees, who in their majority want to leave.

Future prospects are even worse for those asylum seekers who receive a negative answer to their application for international protection and do not have the right to apply for any assistance. As for those with no legal documents of any kind – the ‘invisible’ ones, according to many interviewees from both groups – most will try to buy a fake passport and make their way to another European country, if they are lucky enough not to be caught and returned. The others will remain in a perpetual limbo.

6 Conclusions and policy recommendations

6.1 Assessment of the current system in covering the basic needs of the displaced

Based on the empirical findings of our research, it can be argued that the current system of assistance to displaced populations in Greece produces a mixed outcome.

On one hand, the current system has succeeded, over the past 6–7 years, in addressing the emergency needs of the displaced population, especially during the first years of the refugee crisis. The active involvement of the UNHCR and of other international, European and national agencies greatly contributed to the smooth roll-out of reception services, while their role has also been decisive in achieving a balance among diverse actors and conflicting interests. Yet on the other hand, it can also be argued that ***the way the humanitarian assistance is organised, encourages the ‘institutionalisation’ of asylum seekers, while from a needs’ perspective, it falls short of addressing anything more than the most basic survival requirements of asylum seekers, and sometimes not even those.***

As regards recognised refugees, with the exception of the small minority that benefit from the HELIOS programme, the current system of social assistance is organised in such a manner that it does not facilitate this population in applying for and therefore enjoying any form of social protection. An exception is the MGI, for which they can apply if they meet certain (complicated) administrative requirements.

As a result, ***the majority of the displaced in Greece live in poverty*** and have to depend on money transfers from their relatives abroad, while the lack of job opportunities and the long waiting period for the clarification of their legal status condemn large numbers of working-age people into inertia and apathy.

Owing to the dire situation they are facing, many of the displaced suffer from serious mental health problems which remain largely untreated, as was repeatedly pointed out by our interviewees and documented by other studies (van de Wiel et al., 2021; Ben Farhat et al., 2018). The displaced also have other health problems, some of them very serious, which are not treated in a systematic way, because of the pandemic, their marginalisation or/and their legal status (IRC, 2020).

The main problems identified by the displaced persons in accessing humanitarian assistance in Greece include the lack of guidance and reliable information regarding access to humanitarian assistance, delays in registration and implementation process, the complexity and large number of documents required by each service and above all the limited scope of the assistance provided. Communication problems further exacerbate these difficulties. Other obstacles reported include the vagueness of the system and their lack of knowledge of the Greek language. The long restrictions imposed by the authorities due to the Covid-19 pandemic further compounded the above problems.

Recognised refugees, for their part, **face significant problems in accessing the national social protection system, for which, in theory, they are eligible.** To begin with, the transition from the status of asylum seeker to that of recognised refugee constitutes a huge challenge for them. As soon as asylum seekers are granted refugee status, they ‘log out’ of the humanitarian assistance system and most of them are left without any assistance, as there is no universal ‘integration bridge’ for all recognised refugees, while many remain without legal documents for several months. At the same time, the national social protection system excludes them by design from most of its services through strict eligibility criteria, as illustrated earlier: for the MGI, the five years’ residency is not required (as it is for all other benefits), but a permanent address is. This requirement is hard to meet as renting a house is very difficult for jobless refugees, who cannot afford to pay three rents up-front and cover the monthly costs of rented accommodation. This situation constitutes a major gap in the social assistance provided to the displaced that needs to be addressed urgently (see 6.5).

Overall, by providing humanitarian assistance that barely covers basic needs, by condemning recognised refugees into a limbo situation for months until their legal documents are issued, and by effectively excluding them from access to the national social protection system, the current systems of assistance do little to improve the well-being of the people they are supposed to help. **The underlying reasons for this outcome relate less to issues of alignment or integration between social protection and humanitarian assistance, and more to implicit or explicit policy choices.**

6.2 Interaction with the host population

Social interaction between the two communities provides a mixed picture. On one hand, the host communities benefit from the presence of asylum seekers and refugees that receive humanitarian assistance, as many households rent their apartments to asylum seekers under the ESTIA accommodation scheme, small traders sell them their products, and the cash assistance programme generates income for the local community. The use of cash cards also contributes to some extent to the communication and interaction between the populations, while it increases the visibility of the displaced in the Greek local economy. If the humanitarian assistance programme was to be discontinued, many people from the host community would lose income.

On the other hand, there is also prejudice and fear of the ‘foreigners’ or the ‘others’, fuelled in part by misinformation. **Some resentment on the part of the host population is expressed** regarding what they consider as discriminatory practices in favour of asylum seekers, like for example the full payment of the rent and the utility bills for the displaced but not for those who are unemployed among the host population. Overall, despite the differences in culture and the reservations of the local communities, and except for some isolated incidents, there are no serious tensions with the refugees.

6.3 The role of stakeholders in providing assistance to the displaced

There seems to be a common understanding among stakeholders from national and international

NGOs that fully integrating assistance to the displaced into the national social protection system would improve the quality of services provided to both the displaced and the host population, since the material, financial and human resources would be more efficiently concentrated towards supporting and protecting all populations in need. **However, full integration would require significant changes in the political agenda and a change of legislation regarding residency requirements.**

A key finding that emerges from the empirical research is that the **difficulty recognised refugees face in accessing the national social protection system is not so much the outcome of limited welfare resources but rather the result of political choices and the lack of interest on behalf of the Greek authorities to make them part of the national social protection system; at another level, it is also due to the displaced population's almost complete lack of knowledge about the provisions and how to access the national system.** The 2021 Strategy for Integration attempts to address this problem by stressing that 'autonomous living for the refugees should be encouraged, so that they do not depend on state benefits and therefore burden the state budget' (Ministry of Migration and Asylum, 2021). The tendency to complicate access to the national welfare system to non-nationals reflects the implicit assumption that access is primarily designed, addressed and perceived (by competent public authorities as well as Greek society) as an exclusive entitlement of Greeks, because of their national ties to the state.

As humanitarian organisations are gradually withdrawing from providing emergency assistance (reception services) to the displaced population in Greece, a new approach is required by the Greek

authorities, who must seek to address the needs of all vulnerable groups, whether asylum seekers, recognised refugees or hosts. In doing so, **it would help to view the refugees as active agents on which to invest, a growth capital, rather than as a 'nuisance' or an imposition.**

6.4 Policy outcomes

The current social assistance system lacks a holistic approach to vulnerability and a commitment on behalf of the state to serve all groups in need – without the sort of distinctions that lead to polarisation and social friction and undermine the integration process. However, **a more inclusive social protection system vis-à-vis refugees is unlikely in the short term, given the current policy pursued by the Greek authorities** (a) to reduce the number of new asylum seekers entering the country, (b) to not actively pursue the integration of refugees, and (c) to keep the numbers of refugees that remain in the country to a minimum.

Within this context, the full integration of humanitarian assistance with the national social protection system, would not work to the benefit of the displaced, mostly for the following two reasons: (1) as pointed out earlier, the Greek government has made it clear on many occasions that it does not wish to make Greece an attractive destination for asylum seekers, migrants and refugees; and (2) at the level of implementation, the government shows interest primarily in the day-to-day management of providing humanitarian assistance to asylum seekers rather than in the long-term integration of recognised refugees. It remains to be seen to what extent actions envisaged in the recently unveiled 2021 Strategy for Integration will be duly and adequately implemented, thus contributing to

the successful integration of this population. Additional problems in a further integration of the systems of assistance relate to (a) the financial and administrative resources required and (b) the (perceived) competing interests of the host and displaced populations in the allocation of limited resources.

Looking to the future, the question arises whether Greece has the administrative capacity, but above all the political will, to integrate recognised refugees who are determined to stay in Greece into its social protection system without discriminating against them with hard-to-meet eligibility criteria. As opposed to the previous years, their numbers are quite low, and provided the current pace of influx of asylum seekers continues, there should be no more than 30,000–40,000 new beneficiaries of international protection every year, many of whom explicitly want to leave for other European destinations. **For a country with a population of 10.5 million inhabitants, these figures are manageable, provided the other EU countries are also willing to show solidarity and assume their share of responsibility by hosting part of this population.** However, it is not simply a question of numbers, but of a political and social consensus that is yet to be established.

6.5 Policy recommendations

A number of policy recommendations emerge as a result of a critical reflection on the empirical findings and an analysis of recent policy developments in Greece. These recommendations cover a wide range of issues, such as improvements in the asylum procedure and the transition period, the administrative capacity of the central and the local governments, social cohesion, as well as broader policy issues.

- Given the continuation of refugee flows, albeit at a much-reduced rate, **humanitarian assistance to asylum seekers can continue to be implemented in parallel to the state social protection system, but in a more structured way** that aims to truly cover the basic needs of the displaced, rather than just saving them from famine and homelessness for a short period. Mental health issues, in particular, need to be treated as a matter of urgency. The question of idleness and passive waiting also needs to be addressed through meaningful activities for the displaced (especially children and young people) while they are waiting for their application to be processed and their legal documents to be issued.

It seems that humanitarian assistance will continue to be managed by the state (central and decentralised) and financed by the EU, while international organisations will continue to assist the Greek authorities with their know-how and technical assistance for the smoother operation of assistance. However, to ensure a minimum standard of protection and the non-violation of the basic human rights of asylum seekers, **it would be useful to establish an over-arching advisory committee, consisting of independent stakeholders** (including, for example, the UNHCR, the Greek Ombudsman and the Greek National Commission for Human Rights) **to monitor and periodically evaluate the implementation of humanitarian assistance on the ground.** Otherwise, **the full take-over by the state of the management of humanitarian assistance, with no monitoring mechanisms, could lead to a deterioration of the living conditions of asylum seekers.** Evidence of such a deterioration of assistance comes from: (a) the recent reduction in the amount of cash transfer awarded to large

families (of over six members, see UNHCR, n.d.), (b) the obligation of asylum seekers to leave their accommodation within one month following the granting of asylum, and (c) the establishment of new ‘closed’ RICs and accommodation structures offering improved living conditions but with limited freedom of movement for the asylum seekers living there (France24, 2021).

- Transition mechanisms that prepare beneficiaries of international protection for their future self-reliance should be provided. Until they receive all their legal documents, a ‘bridge’ programme is required to cover the gap in the protection system. The extension of the HELIOS programme to all recognised refugees, for a period of up to 12 months, could serve this purpose. Apart from actions already implemented, the programme should also aim to introduce refugees to the European values and history that will prepare them for a smooth integration either in Greece or in any other EU country. In addition, all beneficiaries of HELIOS must be assisted in obtaining all necessary documents (VAT number, Greek bank accounts, etc.) that facilitate their integration and are required to access Greek state benefits. Finally, through the HELIOS or another initiative, beneficiaries should be informed on the various state benefits that they can legitimately claim.
- To improve their chances of finding employment, **special programmes for the integration of refugees** in the labour market are required, tailored to their educational background and skills and connected to real labour market needs. The role of the Manpower Employment Organisation (OAED) here is pivotal, through targeted action and initiatives.³⁷
- Another issue that needs to be urgently addressed to avoid a surge in social exclusion is **the problem of homeless recognised refugees**, whose number is expected to rise dramatically, as all asylum seekers with a positive answer to their application are required to vacate their apartments within 30 days. **The risk of growing social exclusion** is further exacerbated by the increasing number of asylum seekers whose application is rejected and who remain in the country irregularly, as ‘invisible’ pariahs, deprived of basic human rights, with no legal documents and no assistance, and who are easy prey to any form of exploitation (MacGregor, 2021). If not addressed, this problem will continue to feed racism and xenophobia and erode social cohesion.
- The greater involvement of the local authorities in providing humanitarian assistance, combined with a system of reciprocity/pay back on behalf of the displaced population to the local communities for their support, could improve both their financial and social status, as well as their interaction with the host communities. **Moreover, the decentralisation of the authorities responsible for providing support services to the displaced populations** would alleviate the burden of the central public administration and

37 See for example the pilot I.Ref.Sos. programme, funded by Erasmus+ (<https://irefsos.oaed.gr>).

social services and improve the quality of services provided. However, the decentralisation of the humanitarian assistance system presupposes the consensus of the local authorities and local communities. In addition, municipalities and regions in Greece do not have a legal mandate to work on issues of integration (OECD, 2018), which further impedes these developments. To address this, the refugee issue should not be communicated as a security concern but as an opportunity for the local communities to integrate migrant populations.

- Following a prolonged period of successive crises (financial, refugee, pandemic), the number of vulnerable people among the host population in Greece has risen, while the services provided by the welfare state have deteriorated. The perceived competition for the allocation of limited welfare resources is a misconception that needs to be addressed, particularly since the humanitarian assistance and the HELIOS programme are EU funded. To this end, and to win over of the local communities who may not be ready for the integration of a culturally diverse population, information and awareness raising campaigns should be organised, with the aim of reversing the negative stereotypes often prevailing in host communities regarding the displaced populations and creating a climate of mutual understanding that would enhance social cohesion and eliminate discrimination.
- Overall, from an EU country perspective, concrete improvements in the social assistance provided to the displaced depend more on the country's migration and social inclusion policies than on the
 - nature of the linkages between humanitarian and social protection. **No matter how assistance to the displaced population is organised – whether parallel, aligned or fully integrated to the national social protection system – the explicit or implicit political choices that shape assistance provision are the ones that will determine the outcome. Within this context, it is premature to suggest a full integration of the assistance systems without a drastic review of wider socio-economic integration and inclusion policies.**
 - In the long run, **if fully integrating assistance to the displaced into the social protection system does become part of the government's policy agenda**, the administrative and operational prerequisites would be numerous and challenging. They include: bold legislative initiatives (like simplifying the eligibility criteria), improved administrative capacity, a change of mentality of the agencies and the personnel involved, adequate funding, and enhanced administrative coordination (perhaps in the form of an inter-ministerial working group), so as to avoid the overlapping of competences. Most importantly, the integration would need to adopt a bottom-up approach, starting with the involvement of local societies. An extensive communication policy and awareness raising for the local communities would greatly contribute to making them become more receptive and reduce reactions, as there will be broader understanding of the benefits of integration, especially as regards a more cohesive society. Through the integration of the systems, the social challenges faced by the displaced populations in Greece will be integrated into the broader

social challenges faced by all people living in Greece, thus promoting unified solutions. Moreover, a significant benefit would be to restore the demographic balance of a rapidly ageing society and strengthen the economy after successive crises.

6.6 Concluding remarks

As outlined above, the Greek state is eager not to appear ‘too friendly’ to applicants and beneficiaries of international protection, so that Greece will stop being a destination country for the displaced. To this end, and in the name of security, it has tightened controls over sea and land borders, thus considerably reducing refugee flows over the past 18 months. Ironically, this approach has recently triggered an interesting backlash. The European Commission, concerned about reports and allegations of push-backs of migrants at its borders and mistreatment of individuals by Greek authorities, urged Greece to set up an ‘independent’ mechanism to monitor and avoid push-backs as a condition for releasing an additional €15.83 million in migration funding (ECRE, 2021c).

While the Greek state is eager to deter asylum seekers from entering the country, the majority of refugees only see Greece as a transit country on their way to the more developed Northern and Western European countries, where they have relatives and friends. Few would consider staying in Greece, provided they had access to employment

and social benefits. ***Their unwillingness to stay goes hand-in-hand with the unwillingness of the Greek state to help them integrate and of the other EU countries to demonstrate solidarity and host a fair share of the refugees.*** Thus, over the years, the displaced populations have unwillingly become the centre of a tug of war between various competing forces: the national authorities and governments, the EU, Greek and the European public opinion, the huge business of illicit human smuggling, Turkey’s geopolitical manoeuvres and the power games in their country of origin.

The ‘not in my backyard’ attitude of a number of EU countries does not contribute to a realistic and viable long-term management of the continuous refugee flows. The EU’s New Pact on Migration and Asylum surfaces the deep divisions persisting among the Member States and the difficulties in creating common ground. The issue of incorporating integration policies in the Pact is still under consideration and it remains to be seen whether it will succeed in balancing the principles of fair sharing of responsibility and of solidarity. However, given the geopolitical instability in the broader Mediterranean region, as well as our empirical findings, ***it appears that a considerable number of the displaced will eventually remain in the country. Their smooth integration into Greek society and the labour market represents one of the major challenges for Greece in the coming years, and one that cannot continue to be overlooked.***

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Appendix 1

Box 1 Indicative list of main welfare benefits – Greece

MINIMUM GUARANTEED INCOME (FORMERLY SOCIAL SOLIDARITY INCOME)

- 200 euros/month for a single person household
- + 100 euros/month for every additional adult member
- + 50 euros/month for every dependent child
- or +100 euros/month for the first child of a single-parent family

Prerequisites:

- annual family income of up to 10,800 euros, regardless of household size
- up to 135,000 euros property value for a couple with 2 children
- up to 9,000 euros money assets for a couple with 2 children
- presumed expenses for maintaining a car of up to 6,000 euros annually

CHILD BENEFIT

Between 28 and 70 euros per month for the first 2 children and between 56 and 140 euros for the third child and upwards.

Prerequisites:

- with an annual income of 26,000 euros for a couple with one child the benefit is 28 euros/month
- with an annual income of 28,000 euros for a couple with 2 children the benefit is 56 euros/month
- with an annual income of 12,000 euros for a couple with 2 children the benefit is 140 euros/month
- with an annual income of 9,000 euros for a single-parent family with one child the benefit is 70 euros per month