

## 4. QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF POLICIES AND SOCIAL PRACTICES ON THE SOCIAL INCLUSION OF MIGRANT POPULATIONS IN GREECE

### *4.1. Key findings from the interviews with stakeholders involved in the integration process in the island of Lesbos*

#### *Contextual information regarding the field work*

The face-to-face interviews were taken by EKKE's researchers Theoni Stathopoulou and Alikí Mouriki during their visit to the island of Lesbos from June 6 to June 9 2019. A total of 8 persons were interviewed, representing a variety of stakeholders, such as managers of accommodation and identification camps, international and local NGOs, advocacy groups and regional authorities. The researchers applied a semi-structured questionnaire and 7 of the 8 interviews were recorded, with the consent of interviewees. Each interview lasted between 45 minutes and one hour and 45 minutes, depending on the availability of the interviewee, but also on the prevailing external conditions (e.g. interruptions). All the stakeholders approached accepted to be interviewed and there were no refusals. The insight they provided on the delicate and complex issue of dealing with the reception and integration of the tens of thousands of migrants and refugees that landed in Lesbos over the years, is invaluable to our study.

The interviewees include the following:

1. Head of Civil Planning, Regional Government. Responsible for coordinating meetings with other agencies involved in the management of the refugee crisis.

2. Chairperson of a civil society enterprise (local NGO), volunteer and health professional.
3. Project coordinator for the local branch of an international NGO.
4. Educator of adult migrants and refugees in Lesbos.
5. Manager of Accommodation Centre.
6. Manager of RIC.
7. Former active member of a local NGO.
8. Co-coordinator of a local NGO.

### *Methodological note*

As a result of mixed migration flows, the boundaries between migrants and refugees are becoming increasingly blurred and their distinction is often arbitrary.<sup>37</sup> As more and more asylum-seekers apply for asylum in Greece, receive refugee status and are set to remain in Greece, the challenge for the host country is to support their integration into the society and the economy. In that sense, regardless of the initial motives of their displacement, the displaced persons eventually become part of the migrant population. Our approach, therefore, in collecting interviews and information has been to consider the refugees and migrants that have arrived in Greece in recent years, and mostly since 2014, as one group, falling under the definition of 'mixed migration'.

### *Background information*

Lesbos has traditionally been one of the primary gateways for migration flows from Turkey into Greece. From 2012, when the flows started picking up, until early 2015, the situation was manageable. However, the situation got out of hand in 2015 and early 2016, when arrivals reached 3,000-4,000 every day, sparking off a long period of turmoil and tension in the island. Following the EU-Turkey agreement concluded in March 2016, migration flows from Turkey to Greece substantially decreased and the situation in the island

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37. See section 2.1. for a detailed conceptual analysis.



seemed to be under control and relatively well organised, at least at the time of our visit, thanks to the huge efforts, will power and dedication of all those involved.<sup>38</sup>

All asylum-seekers arriving at the shores of Lesbos are taken by the Coast Guard and the police to the Reception and Identification Centre (RIC) at Moria, which is the registration point (hotspot) and accommodation centre. At the time of our visit (June 7 2019), the RIC at Moria accommodated 4,912 people from 58 different nationalities (of which 312 unaccompanied children), although its capacity is for 3,000 people. However, by the end of September 2019, owing to the increased influx of migrants and refugees from Turkey since July, the Centre was once again overcrowded with a record number of over 12,600 persons, more than four times its capacity.

As for the other official hosting facility, the Accommodation Centre run by the Municipality of Lesbos at Kara Tepe, hosts 1,300 migrants and refugees from vulnerable groups (families with children, unaccompanied minors, disabled persons and other vulnerable people). Two grassroots refugee camps run by NGOs, the overspill camp “Olive Grove” next to Moria and the *Lesvos Solidarity* PIKPA camp, hosted, at the time of our visit, another 900 asylum seekers (approximately 800 and 100 respectively). Additional accommodation places in urban houses, apartments and hotels are provided by the UNHCR and its local partner *ILIAKTIDA*.

The living conditions in the accommodation facilities vary greatly; the most problematic camps are Moria and the adjacent “Olive

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38. As of 31 August 2019, the total number of refugees and migrants that arrived in Greece since 2015 was **88,750**, of which 25,250 in the islands if the Aegean (see UNHCR Fact Sheet, Greece/1-31 August 2019: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/71310.pdf>). Over one-third of arrivals in 2019 are children. Of those, more than 6 out of 10 are below the age of 12. Additionally, 16% of all children were registered upon arrival as unaccompanied or separated (see UNHCR Greece, Sea Arrivals Dashboard, August 19: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/71287>). The islands of North-East Aegean in particular (Lesbos, Samos and Chios) continue to receive weekly hundreds or thousands of asylum-seekers arriving at their shores. According to the UNHCR, from January to September 2019, the total number of arrivals in Greece by sea was **36,141** persons (36% children), of which 16,078 in the island of Lesbos. See: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/71691>

Grove” and the dire conditions prevailing there are well documented in numerous reports by international organisations, NGOs, the international press and scholars<sup>39</sup>. By contrast, the situation in the Kara Tepe and PIKPA facilities is commendable and gives the population staying there a sense of safety and normality.

According to the organisation *Human Rights Watch*, the containment policy enforced since the March 2016 EU-Turkey agreement, confines asylum seekers on the Aegean islands including Lesbos, until their asylum claims are adjudicated, a process that can take months or even years. Vulnerable asylum seekers may be transferred to the mainland, but delays in the vulnerability assessment procedure and the lack of accommodation on the mainland imply that thousands of eligible individuals and families remain trapped on the island. According to the *UNHCR*, over 4,000 people already identified as vulnerable and eligible for transfer are stranded on the islands.<sup>40</sup> The responsibility for this deplorable situation lies primarily with the EU authorities and the other EU member states that have failed to provide two-thirds of their quota (40,000 places) and thus alleviate some of the pressure on Greece, under the joint relocation system (*ibid.*).

Regarding the handling by the Greek authorities of the continuing migratory flows, it can be described as a mixture of deterrence (containment), belated reactions and ad-hoc solutions towards an overwhelming situation, with occasional incidents of misinformation and violation of basic human rights. There are, however, also some notable exceptions, such as the gradual integration of migrant and refugee children into the educational system and the provision of healthcare to migrants and refugees by an over-burdened public health system. Overtime, the managerial capacity of central and local authorities has improved, thanks to the know-how and expertise acquired and the assistance of NGOs and international funding. There remain, however, many challenges to be addressed.

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39. Apart from overcrowding, the most pressing problem regarding the RIC at Moria is the absence of a sewage system and the over spilling of dirty waters, leading to a high risk of infections (incidents of hepatitis A have been recorded according to an interviewee who has been working in the health sector)

40. See: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/11/21/greece-dire-conditions-asylum-seekers-lesbos>

#### *4.1.1. Assessment of the integration process in Lesbos*

Interviewees were asked to give their view on several aspects of the integration process of migrants and refugees stranded in the island of Lesbos.

The main obstacles that asylum-seekers face in the process of integration include their own unwillingness to integrate as they do not see Greece as a place of permanent stay, the poor living conditions, the uncertainty about the future and their negative portrayal by certain media, that has been fueled by the delinquent behaviour of some of the displaced persons and the xenophobic rhetoric of the Golden Dawn party and some media.

Regarding their access to the basic rights that would contribute to their integration, most of our interlocutors pointed out that the most problematic areas include the non-availability of decent housing conditions, adequate health services and, in particular, mental health support, a most pressing need that is not adequately addressed.

The process of integration would be greatly enhanced if the asylum-seekers lived in decent conditions (in houses and apartments rather than at the Reception Centres) and if they could have a sense of normality in their lives and a job. There is a widespread view that refugees and migrants are not treated with dignity and respect: according to an interviewee *“they are humiliated”*.

#### *4.1.2 Challenges to be addressed*

##### *(a) Asylum procedures*

A major issue that refugees and asylum-seekers are faced with is the blurred institutional framework regarding their asylum application and the long delays in processing their claim; as a result, asylum-seekers do not know how long they will stay in their present situation in Lesbos, as no major relocation is taking place any more. Some applicants may have to wait for 2-3 years to have their papers processed because of the lengthy bureaucratic procedures with the processing of the asylum claim. The seriously under-staffed Asylum Committee is working under tremendous pressure. “Some refugees

are in Lesbos for over two years because their claim has been rejected". The Asylum Service rejects some applications as a deterrent measure. The asylum-seekers cannot travel to mainland Greece, unless they have their legal documents in order. At the time of our visit, significant delays were also recorded in getting a National Insurance Number (AMKA)<sup>41</sup> and a tax identification number TIN, to be eligible for certain social benefits (healthcare access, school enrollment). According to an interviewee "it was wrong to link asylum to vulnerability".

*(b) Over-burdened state infrastructure (Coast Guard, Police, healthcare, education, accommodation)*

The central and local authorities have been overwhelmed by the continuous influx of migrants and refugees in Lesbos and at first showed limited capacity in addressing the problems that emerged, although gradually things started to work out better.

According to an interviewee, the central state does little to help the integration process ("only in specific cases") and often acts as a buy-stander, watching the NGOs compete between them, while the local authorities mostly provide only accommodation services, with very few initiatives in other areas.

This is the result of the fact that the support services are seriously under-staffed. The Coast Guard, the police force, the health services and municipal workers have been seriously overburdened, and often suffer from the burn-out effect themselves, due to the difficult situation in Lesbos: "they also need psychological support and de-compression". It would be fair, as an interviewee suggested, a part of the considerable EU funds to address the refugee crisis, to be directed towards supporting the front-line staff who offer the most

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41. One of the first initiatives of the newly elected New Democracy government in July 2019 was to suspend the process of issuing a Social Security Number (AMKA) to third-country nationals that do not fulfill the legal requirements. This decision left the newly arriving asylum-seekers without access to healthcare and medications, with the exception of emergency situations. The new system granting access to healthcare and medication to asylum seekers was announced in November 2019 but has only recently come into force.



and yet continue, with few resources, to “do a tremendous job”, especially in healthcare.

The tendency of some NGOs (who, otherwise, do a great job) to emphasise the deficiencies of state agencies, so as to attract more funding for themselves, creates a distorted picture of what is happening on the field, thus cancelling out the huge efforts of the personnel involved, a front-line senior executive pointed out.

In a nutshell, as one interviewee from an international NGO underlined, the criticism towards the Greek authorities regarding their handling of the refugee crisis is unfair:

*“you cannot point fingers against Greece. Greece is unlucky. It’s a very cheap argument to throw money on the problem on behalf of the EU”.*

### *(c) Living conditions and access to basic rights and services*

#### **Accommodation**

The accommodation needs of migrants and refugees are constant and complex, but, according to an interviewee, some international bodies: “don’t know how to read the picture”.

The RIC at Moria and the Accommodation Centre at Kara Tepe are the two camps that host the vast majority of migrants and refugees arriving on the shores of Lesbos. The camps are guarded but they are not ‘closed centres’ and residents can move in and out. As stated above, at the time of our visit, dire conditions prevailed in the over-crowded RIC of Moria and the adjacent over-spill camp “Olive Grove”, where around 800 migrants and refugees live in make shift tents: long queues for food and toilet, fear for their physical and mental integrity, very poor hygiene, lack of privacy and growing tensions. Efforts are made for vulnerable groups (children, women, disabled persons) to be quickly moved to the Kara Tepe site where living conditions are significantly better. However, as an interviewee from an international NGO pointed out, some vulnerable people may have to stay in Moria for as long as two years, especially those from Africa, because their vulnerability is hard to establish (for example, the survivors of torture).

The Accommodation Centre at *Kara Tepe* hosts 1,300 vulnerable migrants and refugees and their families in 261 boxes. The camp, which is a 'green site', as 60% of its energy requirements are covered by solar panels (provided by the Dutch NGO "Movement on the Ground"), is under the authority of the Municipality of Lesbos and is run by 16 employees, who are paid by EU funds, and 20 volunteers. A large part of the necessary works to organise the camp were carried out by NGOs, thus cutting short a lot of red tape procedures. The living standards at Kara Tepe, which most of the time works at full capacity, are considered as exemplary. The management of the camp makes no distinctions between migrants and refugees or between the various ethnic and religious groups. Instead, the focus is on building mutual trust and understanding, thus protecting the population living in the camp from misinformation and fake news spread around deliberately. The factors that contribute the most to the successful adjustment of the populations hosted in the camp include "the spirit and the oxygen that the camp offers them"; the support from formal and informal networks and the local community which is hospitable; and the educational programmes that are attended by the majority of refugees and migrants staying in the camp (by most of the children but by many adults as well), as well as the good access to socio-psychological support provided by the "Doctors without Borders".

A considerable number of asylum-seekers are also hosted in hotels and apartments. The local NGO ILIAKTIDA, in partnership with the UNHCR and the Programme ESTIA, provides short-term accommodation places to over 730 vulnerable asylum-seekers, of which 150 children, in 97 guesthouses (hotels and apartments) in Lesbos.

### Healthcare

Access of migrants and refugees to healthcare and medical treatment is perhaps, along with accommodation, the most urgent problem that authorities and NGOs need to address on the ground.

Unmet medical needs, including mental health issues, constitute a major issue for the displaced populations. Inside the over-populated camp of Moria, diseases that are related to the living conditions

prevailing in the camp and difficult access to primary healthcare add to the exasperation of asylum-seekers. During the day, patients usually go to the NGOs operating inside the RIC for healthcare, as the official medical authority unit run by the National Public Health Organization, the successor of the Centre for diseases control and prevention (EODY-former KEELPNO) is understaffed, whilst between midnight and 8 a.m., there is only one medical doctor inside the camp, who cannot be accessed directly. MSF operates two clinics outside the Moria camp, of which one pediatric; they provide family planning, sexual and reproductive health services with two midwives, and other medical services from 9 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. daily.

Difficult medical cases that need to be taken to Athens for treatment may take 2-3 months, according to one of our interlocutors. The risk of suicide is high, and it cannot be averted, as those at risk cannot be taken to shelters where they can be supervised. The assessment of vulnerability takes time and EODY (former KEELPNO) rejects 50% of the cases.

There are also serious unmet needs regarding **mental health problems** owing to the very small number of qualified doctors (there are only 2 psychiatrists in private practice and 2 in the island's public hospital). There are many asylum-seekers that are treated for PTSD symptoms, but many others receive no treatment at all or are not even examined. Asylum-seekers are quite likely to attempt suicide, while the presence of a total stranger, who acts as an interpreter during the medical visit, makes their treatment even more difficult, as they are reluctant to give a sincere account of their situation.

The situation is further complicated by the fact that, due to the financial crisis, the public health care system has been under severe pressure during the last decade and is going through a process of change. Occasional incidences of racist behaviour, on behalf of the medical staff have also been mentioned, but they are the exception.

### Employment

Another major problem facing asylum-seekers, especially males, is the unavailability of **paid employment** (with very few exceptions such as seasonal oil picking, working in a restaurant, making bags, etc.), despite their eagerness to work:

- “they want to work, mostly the men”;
- “any kind of work would help these people, many of whom are deeply traumatized, feel better”.

## Education

Access to education and training and the learning of the Greek language constitute the most important tools in the integration progress, according to most of our interlocutors. The NGOs in Lesbos have offered great services in the area of education, making up for the gaps in public education and creating educational material that can be further exploited, elsewhere. One local NGO, in collaboration with a German organisation, provides classes to adult migrants and refugees living in Lesbos since 2016. The classes are open to anyone willing to attend and the aim is to provide “a safe social space in the city”.

Greek classes last 3-4 months and offer basic language skills so that students can respond to their daily needs. Alternatively, students can take classes in English and computing. So far, a total of 130 students have attended classes, selected either on a ‘first-come-first served’ basis or depending on their medical condition (e.g. if they need mental health support). The students can change class following a test, while class modules continuously adapt to the particular needs of the students, a real challenge for the teachers. The age range is 18-58 years and the main countries of origin are: Afghanistan, Iran, Cameroun, Sierra-Leone and Guinea.

As for school-age children, access to education is much better, despite the discontinuities (there is no follow-up when the children are relocated to mainland Greece). School enrolment has become mandatory for all refugee and migrant children aged between 6-15 years but availability of places still lags behind, especially for pre-school children. More importantly, children living at the RIC of Moria do not have any access to education as the RIC is outside the authority of the Ministry of Education, whilst for children living in accommodation centres, there are many informal arrangements inside the camps or in other structures run by NGOs. Refugee and migrant children are so keen to attend school that they disregard the



pain caused by the mandatory vaccinations that are required in order to enroll and urge one another to get the shot. However, in some cases parents are reluctant to send the children to school as they see their stay in Greece temporary.

### Communication

Language and communication problems are gradually being addressed through initiatives by NGOs and volunteers (e.g. MOSAIK). Cultural mediators play a crucial role: “we cannot function without them”.

The EU-Turkey agreement in 2016 to some degree changed the attitudes of migrants and refugees who, conscious that they may spend a long time in Greece, decide to take classes in Greek language, which was not the case before. The majority still considers Greece “as a passage” or a transit country.

#### *(d) Attitude of EU countries and authorities*

The EU authorities are strongly criticised for handling the continuing migratory flows in an unacceptable way, as their policies encourage the entrapment of the asylum-seekers in the islands and make their relocation to the mainland extremely difficult, in order to deter more arrivals.

Moreover, the other EU countries continue their “wishy-washy” attitude towards the problem and do not take their fair share of migrants and refugees:

*“we will have problems with Dublin-II. There are bizarre scenarios about relocating people back to Syria”.*

The understanding among the interviewees that the migration policy is being formulated at the EU level leads them to presume that the pressure on Greece will not ease and that peoples’ smugglers will continue to send people to Greece, undisturbed, as a camp manager put it.

### (e) *Role of the NGOs*

The role of NGOs in dealing with the migratory flows in Lesbos is ambivalent. On one hand they assisted an unprepared Greek state to cope with the refugee crisis; they set up networks that help migrants and refugees in their quest for housing, learning the language and finding a job. On the other, they “went over the board”, in the sense that at the peak of the crisis there were over a hundred NGOs stationed in the island: “careers have been built on the refugee crisis”.<sup>42</sup> In some cases their staff is arrogant, unwilling to cooperate with the local management teams: “they act as they like”. Others have good intentions but lack experience. Overall, NGOs are under pressure to deliver results in a short space of time, but they lack coordination between them: “there is no pathway for coordination”.

Overtime it seems that, as one interviewee put it, the overwhelming presence of NGOs in the island of Lesbos “was a bubble that burst. Not many foreign volunteers come here anymore”. By contrast, according to one international interlocutor, the local volunteer organisations are the ones that look most ahead, whilst the international NGOs are more focused on providing food, basic services and improved living conditions. The help provided by NGOs has in some cases “pampered” the refugees and led to their inactivation.

Intense competition for funding among NGOs and often the creation of artificial needs so as to ensure donations, are also issues of concern that need to be addressed. Some of our interlocutors pointed out the many moral dilemmas that emerge regarding some of the NGOs operating in Lesbos, despite the fact that were it not for the NGOs, there would have been huge problems in the island:

*“some want to raise more money to increase their funding, others want to raise their profile and some even do money laundering<sup>43</sup>”.*

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42. The case of the PIKPA village under the name “All together for the crisis” constitutes, according to one of our interlocutors, a typical example of how a very successful undertaking came to an end when individual ambitions interfered.

43. This is a serious allegation that we could not, in any way, confirm. Yet, it shows how the uncontrolled activities of a few NGOs in Lesbos, some of which without any credentials, create impressions that do not do justice to the noble cause of the large majority of them.

At present, most NGOs are in a very precarious situation and they do not know if they will continue to receive funding and provide their services. As a result, the migrants and refugees feel very vulnerable.

*(f) Exploitation of migrants and refugees by peoples' smugglers and organised crime*

One critical dimension in the continuing influx of migrants and refugees into Greece is the role played by people's smugglers' networks, often associated with organised crime. According to many of our interlocutors, the people smugglers in Turkey attract migrants and refugees by promising them a 'full package' in Greece that includes transfer, accommodation, nutrition and healthcare<sup>44</sup>. More importantly, migratory flows are heavily dependent on the geopolitical games played by Turkey, who controls the flows as it wishes, and the EU authorities which –according to an interlocutor “use Greece like a ‘whore’. ‘I pay you to do the job’.”

Once in the island of Lesbos, migrants and refugees often fall victim of trafficking and forgery networks that operate in the island and that promise to help asylum-seekers willing to pay the price, leave the island before their status has been defined.

Last but not least, instances of sexual exploitation, mostly of women, have been reported.

*(g) Interaction with the local communities*

With few exceptions, the majority of the local population seems to have come to terms with the continued presence of the refugees and migrants arriving in scores in the island, and to co-exist with the latter with no serious problems. Only some parents of Albanian origin have reacted against migrant and refugee children attending the same school as their kids.

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44. Interview of the former manager of Moria RIC Mr. G. Balpakakis, who resigned in September 2019. See: <https://www.kathimerini.gr/1042440/article/epi-kairothta/ellada/g-mpalpakakhs-sth-moria-den-mporw-na-3anapaw>

At the peak of the refugee crisis in 2015-2016, when thousands kept arriving at the shores of Lesbos every day (on one particular day in 2015, 8,500 arrivals were recorded), the reaction of the local people was deeply moving, and an outburst of humanism was displayed. Ever since, the local society has shown a remarkable resilience in dealing with the humanitarian crisis. On the other hand, some locals made a fortune by transferring refugees from the shores to the city of Mytilene. The media, however, tend to manipulate the public opinion, by giving a negative portrayal of migrants and refugees, cultivating a “climate of fear” in some cases.

According to another interviewee, the attitude of the local communities towards migrants and refugees is ambivalent. Cultural differences (“the refugees are 40 years behind from us”), their negative portrayal in the media and the reluctance of refugees themselves to integrate do not make their acceptance any easier. As another interlocutor pointed out, the local population is reluctant to come closer to the migrants and refugees that live in Lesbos (some of whom may be living there for two years), but “at least, they show a better attitude than Chios and Samos” (the other two Aegean islands that receive the bulk of the mixed migration flows).

On the other hand, most of the interviewees pointed out that the refugee crisis has also benefited the local population, in terms of income-generation and jobs:

*“the money spent for the refugees stays here, that’s why the local people don’t protest so much”.*

The occasional excursions organised by the management of the accommodation facilities to other parts of the island, in view of becoming acquainted with the place in which the migrants and refugees live, also play their part in connecting with the local communities.

#### *(h) Uncertainty about the future*

Until the EU-Turkey agreement in 2016, the vast majority of migrants and refugees wanted to leave Greece and head further North, as “they do not consider Greece to be part of Europe”. They feel



trapped in Lesbos, not knowing when and where they will be allowed to go next. The waiting process “freezes” their lives condemning them in a limbo situation. Nowadays, an increasing number of asylum-seekers, especially unaccompanied children, want to stay in Lesbos and eventually find a job. However, in Greece it takes 7 years to be eligible for a work and residence permit.

Serious housing and survival problems are expected to arise when the EU-funded cash assistance programme for the asylum-seekers is terminated (€90 euro per adult per month plus €50 per child per month). Many migrants and refugees will become homeless.

Lengthy bureaucratic procedures regarding the acquisition of citizenship also constitute a serious obstacle to the process of integration.

What fuels the most the uncertainty is the fact that, as one of our interlocutors put it:

*“there is still a war in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, so it’s not a success the EU-Turkey agreement”.*

#### 4.1.3. Suggestions-recommendations

A number of suggestions and recommendations –both general and specific- were put forward by our interlocutors regarding the improvement of the integration process of migrants and refugees. Special emphasis was put on the access to paid employment and skills acquisition as a prerequisite for a successful integration, the speeding up of the asylum process and the treatment of post-traumatic disorders and other health problems related to displacement. Of equal importance for the integration of migrants and refugees is access to decent housing, their freedom of movement to mainland Greece and the improvement of the economic situation of Greece that would attenuate the reactions of the local population and their feelings of having to compete for limited resources.

A list of proposals follows:

*“there are one million ideas that can be implemented but first they need to be discussed and prioritised”:*

## Health care provision

The deployment of the programme Philos-II by the Ministry of Health will make a huge difference, as it will allow the recruitment of additional medical staff in Moria and in the other Reception Centres.

## Employment

- provide job opportunities to refugees and migrants through employment programmes adjusted to their skills; conclude state agreements with employers to recruit an equal number of Greeks and refugees;
- refugees and migrants could help reinvigorate depopulated villages, cultivate abandoned fields and carry out rural work;
- provide access to vocational training and make the best use of their skills, especially in the social economy sector;
- assign tasks to migrants and refugees in order to mobilize and activate them.

## Education

- emphasis should be put on school attendance, as school is essential in providing a sense of normality in the disrupted lives of children
- despite the difficulties of adjusting to a radically different school environment, school attendance by refugee and migrant children is a process that also benefits Greek children.

## Policy interventions

- need for a holistic approach to the problem and a clear integration policy, “that needs time, synergies, a plan, patience and infrastructure”;
- speeding up of the asylum application process and swift transfer of migrants and refugees arriving in Lesbos and the other islands to mainland Greece;<sup>45</sup>

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45. A camp manager gave as an example the process that takes place in Italy:

- reduction of the excessive red-tape that complicates significantly and delays the procurement of material resources needed in the camps, as well as greater transparency;<sup>46</sup>
- stricter control and transparency in the management of NGOs to make them more efficient;
- closer cooperation between all the stakeholders, that need to work as a ‘chain’;
- sustainability of measures: “the parachuting interventions do no good”;
- the integration period is a complex and difficult process that should last longer than just two years.

#### EU-level policies

- the central authorities and the EU authorities need to have knowledge of the field, to come to grips with the real problems and not be limited to a magical image from a distance;
- need to find a fair solution to the problem.

#### Empowerment of migrants and refugees

- refugees and migrants need to feel a sense of belonging and become “visible”; they should not be treated as “sheep”, as “lazy people who live on benefits”;
- “normality opens doors”;
- “people [refugees] are very resourceful” although “it is very difficult to create a space”;
- what makes migrants and refugees resilient is “their social capital, their trauma, and what they continue to experience here”; “they need to overcome their own resistance to [their new reality]”.

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within 24 hours all newly arrived asylum-seekers are registered, and after attending some vocational training course, they are swiftly distributed to the various regions.

46. A point in case is the considerable delays in the replenishment of fire extinguishers at the RIC in Moria, that expose the residents to the dangers of an uncontrolled fire. Recently, an Afghan woman died in Moria because her dwelling caught fire.

As one interviewee put it:

*“by caring for people and protecting them, by making them feel useful and by giving them a sense of purpose, the process of integration is made much easier”.*

#### Challenges for the local communities

- although many local people are very supportive, the local community needs to become more involved in the integration process of migrants and refugees;
- fears of growing racism and xenophobia, despite the fact that the refugee crisis provided an opportunity to improve some of the infrastructure for the local population as well.

#### 4.1.4. Concluding remarks

Most of our interviewees are not at all satisfied with the overall integration prospects. They believe that the state lacks a long-term plan in dealing with the migratory flows:

*“very few steps have been taken, without forward looking planning and infrastructure. We are left very much behind”.*

Even though many of their basic needs are being covered, the degree of integration of asylum-seekers is minimal. The uncertainty about the future, the communication difficulties, the lack of employment opportunities, the contradictory information on their rights, poor healthcare and social services and security issues, add to the exasperation of asylum-seekers and compromise their integration prospects. Evidence from the empirical study conducted by EKKE in 2016 in six refugee camps<sup>47</sup> has shown that uncertainty about the future is strongly associated with feelings of insecurity and poor

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47. See Stathopoulou, T, Avrami, L, Kostaki, A, Cavounidis, J, Eikemo, T.A (2019) Safety, Health and Trauma among newly arrived refugees in Greece. *Journal of Refugee studies*. Oxford University Press. Jervelund S.S, Nordheim O, Stathopoulou T, Eikemo TA. (2019) Non-communicable diseases among refugee claimants in Greek refugee camps – are their healthcare needs met? *Journal of Refugee studies*. Oxford University Press (2019). de Montgomery C, Stathopoulou, T, Eikemo, T.A. (2019) Asylum seek-



physical and mental health status among refugees. Early health and especially mental health assessment are thus essential and should be a policy priority to the benefit of migrant and public health<sup>48</sup>.

As for the on-going political controversy regarding the overwhelming presence of refugees and migrants and its repercussions on the local population, it should be said that there are two sides to the coin: on one hand, the local communities have to come to terms with the imposed upon them co-existence with a very diverse and numerous migrant population mostly living under emergency conditions and eager to leave the island; on the other, the refugee crisis has benefited the local population, in terms of income-generation and jobs.

As these displaced populations are set to stay for an indefinite period of time in the island of Lesbos, waiting for their asylum application to be processed, the question of their integration prospects comes to the foreground. As it emerged from the interviews with the stakeholders, the most important factors that can contribute to the integration process include the empowerment of migrants and refugees, the provision of clear information on the institutional framework, stability of interventions and security. Equally important is the support from the local community formal and informal networks and access to socio-psychological support services from the very first moment of the arrival of migrants and refugees. Special care should be given to the needs of children and adolescents, both accompanied by their families or unaccompanied.

All of the above, of course, pertain to 'normal' circumstances of controlled migration flows. However, no integration process can take place, nor the access to basic rights can be guaranteed, when the islands are overwhelmed by new arrivals of migrants and refugees every day, that, in the words of a UNHCR recent report, "worsen the situation in already dangerously overcrowded facilities there".<sup>49</sup>

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ing parents' reports of health deterioration in their children since fleeing their home country. *Journal of Refugee studies*. Oxford University Press (2019).

48. WHO (2018) Report on the health of refugees and migrants in the WHO European Region: No public health without refugee and migrant health. Copenhagen: World Health Organization.

49. See: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/10/1048312>

Urgent measures are, thus, required, that will ease the burden on the islands and improve the conditions in the reception facilities. To this end, over the last 2 months, the Greek government has transferred (not without problems) almost 4,000 migrants and refugees from the islands to the mainland. But as new arrivals drastically outnumber the transfers, the situation resembles a 'bottomless pit' that could easily become, once again, a hard to manage humanitarian crisis.

#### *4.2. Key findings from the interviews with stakeholders involved in the integration process in Athens*

##### *Contextual information regarding the field work*

A total of seven in-depth interviews questionnaire were carried out in Athens with representatives from various stakeholders involved in the integration process of migrants and refugees in Greece.<sup>50</sup> The persons interviewed came from a diversified background and provided an informed and stimulating insight of the challenges associated with the integration of migrants and refugees in the Greek society. The interviews were taken in July and September 2019, at a time when Greece was going through a change in government, as well as a recalibration of migrant policies. In 6 out of 7 cases the interviews were recorded, following the consent of the persons interviewed. The interviewees include the following:

1. A Special Scientist from the Greek Ombudsman with 25 years of experience in dealing with migrants and refugees.
2. A Special Scientist from the Greek Ombudsman with 20 years of experience in dealing with migrants and refugees.
3. A Vice-Mayor (at the time of the interview) from the Municipality of Athens, in charge of the integration of migrants for 3 years at the local government and another 6 years of previous experience.

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50. The interviews were taken by researchers A. Frangiskou, G. Kandyliis, N. Sarris and M. Thanopoulou.

4. A senior-level officer from the General Directorate of Migration Policy, Reception and Asylum, Ministry of Citizen Protection, dealing with the issue of integration since 2010.
5. A senior-level officer from the Social Inclusion Department of the General Secretariat for Migration Policy, Ministry of Citizen Protection, dealing with integration issues for over 20 years.
6. The Manager of an international humanitarian NGO with 20 years of experience in dealing with vulnerable populations in war-stricken zones and in crisis areas.
7. A young asylum-seeker from Afghanistan who arrived in Greece in March 2016 and has applied, together with his mother and two siblings, for family reunification in Germany. Today he works as an interpreter for a local NGO which is active in issues concerning second-generation migrants, but also provides services to newly arrived refugees and migrants, including career counselling, non-formal education and advocacy (his account is presented separately, to distinguish it from the views of our Greek interlocutors).

#### *4.2.1. Assessment of the integration process*

##### *General overview*

Most interviewees pointed out that significant effort has been made over the past decades for the integration of migrants and refugees in the Greek society, without, of course, having reached the ideal result, as one interviewee put it. To a large degree, and despite the delays and the absence of coherent and clear migration policies, at the legislative level at least, many pending issues have been addressed. Improvements to the legislation in force have contributed to the access to basic rights and services, yet the main problem remains the implementation of the legislative framework, that lags behind.

A key informant involved in policy making provides a more pessimistic assessment of the integration process: “integration has never gone well, nor is it at present”, whilst he makes the distinction between “self-integration” through hard work, which he considers is



the case of the Albanian migrants, and the systematic implementation of an integration policy. To his view, until 2015, the degree of integration was below average. This is due partly to the fact that there is no mandatory system for migrant integration, as there is for asylum application (a European *acquis* that has been incorporated into Greek law). The only initiative worth mentioning was the Greek language courses funded with about 1.5 million euro per year. But in 2015, everything changed, with the refugee crisis acting as a catalyst. All the money and the attention started going towards the refugees: “the refugee issue absorbed the migration issue”, even though there are about 600,000 authorised migrants living in the country (holders of a residence permit), whilst asylum seekers do not exceed 75,000. Under these circumstances the interviewee believes that “there is no integration process. It’s all about reception policies”. In this sense the waiting time for the asylum to be granted or rejected, that can take up to two years, could be considered as “a premature integration” for those involved in the process.

In the same line of thought, another interviewee pointed out that the integration process in Greece so far “is not a benchmarking exercise” and that integration should not be only about reception, accommodation or hospitality, but about programmes that provide effective integration as well. Undoubtedly, the decisive factor is the will of the migrants themselves to be integrated in the Greek society: “there are migrants who are passing-by and migrants who wish to stay here”.

Looking back into the early years of migratory movements to Greece, another interviewee described the various distinct phases of integration: from the early 1990s to about 2005/2006, integration had an economic dimension and was more of a self-integration process in terms of gaining access to housing, education and health. Since 1997, integration was about the legalisation process of migrants so that they could acquire citizens’ rights. After 2004, the profile of migrants started to gradually change from families and individuals that came from the former socialist countries to young men from a broad range of nationalities. The turning point was in 2014, when the first Syrian refugee families arrived in Greece and benefited from ‘positive discrimination’ measures. The massive in-



flux of refugees that followed, and which concurred with the economic crisis, in many cases led to dis-integration, whilst the first generation of refugees and migrants felt resentment for the treatment of new-comers.

The process of integration varies greatly depending on the legal status of migrants and refugees. As far as legislation on the integration of migrants is concerned<sup>51</sup>, there are provisions in the *Migration and Social Integration Code* (Law 4251/2014), as well as in other legislative initiatives regarding recognised refugees, socioeconomic inclusion and equal treatment. The main implementation problems are of two kinds: the first relates to the difficulty of many migrants and refugees to gain access to certified documents from their war-stricken country of origin (e.g. educational and skills qualifications); the second regards the loss of authorised legal status suffered by many long-established migrants because (a) of their difficulty, especially during the economic crisis, in finding paid employment with social security contributions, that are needed in order to qualify for the residence permit and (b) the under-staffing of and lack of co-ordination between the competent authorities. There are also legal loopholes regarding the rights of those in need of international protection: they can send their children to school, but accommodation is often in reception centres that have become ghettos and the local communities are often hostile towards them. No measures exist to support their access to paid employment.

Nationality, according to the law, is an important criterion for the enjoyment of rights, not necessarily political rights, but mostly social rights such as access to health services, housing, food and nutrition, education, and work. Third-country citizens face discrimination on the grounds of their nationality. For example, they are not eligible for the elderly peoples' housing benefit, as the legislative framework does not allow this benefit to be granted to third-country citizens. The same is true for other social rights and services.

According to an interviewee's informed opinion, integration is viewed as a stage *after* the residence permit and *before* citizenship acquisition. In this sense, the integration programmes implemented so

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51. This is not associated with the process of granting the Greek nationality.

far (92 initiatives between 2007 and 2015) were targeted towards authorised migrants and refugees.

At the local level, the role of Local Administration is important; wherever Municipalities and Regions have undertaken initiatives, results have been positive. The establishment of Migrant Integration Councils (MICs), which operate as advisory bodies within municipalities, in which representatives of migrants and refugees also participate, has contributed to this end. Some issues, however, require improvement in the institutional framework, so that social rights can be enjoyed and access to services will not depend on nationality, but on the fact that they are long-term migrants in Greece. On the positive side, the right of all children of a migrant or refugee background to be able to enrol in the Greek school system is a step forward towards a successful integration.

The *National Strategy for the Inclusion of Third-country Citizens, 2015-2019* launched in 2013, as a first systematic attempt to develop an integration policy for third-country citizens legally residing in Greece, was characterised by one interviewee as too general and largely dependent on the local government organisations for its implementation.<sup>52</sup> The establishment of the Ministry for Migration Policy in 2017 was “a desperate, go-ahead reaction” to the refugee crisis, but its lack of capacity, in terms of infrastructure and human resources, was blatant; inevitably it became a ministry “dealing with itself rather than with migrants”, as an interviewee put it.

Overall, as another interviewee pointed out, Greece continues to act today as it did during the peak of the refugee crisis in 2015, with no plan, as if under emergency conditions. Migration policies continue to have a very short-term perspective, they are circumstantial and they do not consider the long-term implications of the various agreements concluded at the EU level (namely, Dublin-II, Schengen, etc.), nor do they have a sense of continuity.

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52. A new action plan, *The National Strategy for Inclusion*, was launched in February 2019 by the previous administration, reflecting the Ministry of Migration's view on the rights of refugees and migrants, and taking into account the massive influx of mixed migratory populations and of asylum-seekers in quest of international protection, but also the economic recession in Greece between 2009-2017. See: <http://www.opengov.gr/immigration/?p=801>

*Assessment of various aspects of the integration process through the eyes of the young migrant O.***Legal issues**

Bureaucracy is one of the most important obstacles migrants face in their everyday life in Greece, especially because the validation of legal documents often takes too long, without any official explanation. There are cases where civil servants could have delivered the documents earlier but failed to do so, for little-known reasons.

**Employment**

Refugees and migrants could have the opportunity to find a job if adequately supported and advised. The main challenges relate to their limited competence in Greek (although speaking English increases the chances of being offered a job) and to Greek employers' prejudices towards foreigners. Migrants in Greece have various levels of education, skills and work experiences, but it is hard for them to get into contact with local employers.

**Citizenship**

Non-formal courses are organised by NGOs, for people who wish to apply for Greek citizenship (and have to prove their familiarity with the Greek culture).

**Education**

Learning the Greek language is a prerequisite for integration, communication and equality in the Greek society.

While there is a quite long list of organisations that provide Greek language courses, not all immigrant groups (e.g. in terms of age and language level) have access to them. School-age children often find themselves in areas that are isolated and far away from local schools. For the younger (those at the age of primary education) there are usually classes organised in the camps but older children (especially over 16) have to cover long distances to attend the 'Intercultural School' in the Municipality of Elliniko (in Southern Athens). As a result, their capacity in the Greek language does not improve and it is very difficult

for them to integrate into the Greek society. Vocational training is also necessary but it is rather restricted until now.

### Healthcare

Migrants face serious difficulties with regard to access to health services (“as there are similar problems for Greek citizens”), especially so for people residing in the camps. One may need several hours to be transferred from a camp to the hospital, even in the case of an emergency. There is also an issue with migrants’ and refugees’ registration in the Social Insurance Registry (AMKA), which is necessary in order to have access to the public health system. The new government decided to change the existing procedure and the new one is not yet defined. Healthcare professionals are often unwilling to provide services to unregistered individuals, as he experienced once himself.

### Racism

Our interviewee thinks that it sounds “embarrassing to speak about racism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century”, but he gives the example of doctors unwilling to examine someone when they see a non-Greek name in the patients’ list. He mentioned a personal experience of discrimination and violence that he suffered from a Greek doctor in a local hospital in Athens. In this case, there were Greek people who defended him.

### Housing

Despite the inflow of money from the EU for accommodation purposes, “nothing has been done yet”. Only the most vulnerable and families have access to urban apartments that are rented for this purpose by UNHCR and the Municipality of Athens (ESTIA programme) and then only for six months. This is far from a solution to the housing problem. Recently the government decided to evacuate squatted buildings in Athens, whilst at the same time the camps in the islands (like Moria) and in mainland Greece are heavily overcrowded. He suggests that since there are so many vacant urban apartments, they could be used to house migrants and refugees in need. Local homeowners would also benefit from such a policy. Apart from decent living conditions, this would enable better communication between Greeks and migrants in their common residential areas.



*Factors that contribute to the successful integration of migrants and refugees in the host country*

The process of integration depends on a broad range of policies, ranging from the legislative framework to the access to basic rights and services, but also on the demographic and cultural characteristics of the host country and the migrant populations. Our interlocutors gave emphasis on the following factors.

- (a) Access to education for all children, irrespective of the legal status of their parents (law 1975/91). The educational community was very active in promoting the integration of all non-native children into the school system.
- (b) Knowledge of the Greek language by adults.
- (c) Legal status and legal support so that migrants and refugees can claim their rights.
- (d) Access to employment, which is a pre-requisite for the authorised stay and the access to healthcare services and other benefits.
- (e) Access to decent housing.
- (f) The family situation. It is easier for a family to become accepted in a neighbourhood.
- (g) The interaction with the local communities.

As for the agencies that contribute the most to the integration process they are, to the view of one interviewee, by order of importance, the international organisations, followed by the local government (with the Migrant Integration Centres) and finally NGOs and local organisations and volunteers. As for the central government, it provides as much funding as it can afford but no further than this: "If you have a weak public sector... what can you do?"

*Main obstacles encountered by migrants and refugees in their integration process*

- (a) The perception of Greeks that the population of Greece is composed only by natives, a perception that creates prejudices, especially on the question of religion.

- (b) The integration policies of the Greek state are mostly addressed to EU citizens and not to third-country citizens, whom it treats as 'second-class' citizens.
- (c) The policy of isolation and ghettoisation of migrants and refugees that is being enforced, rather than an inclusion strategy with positive measures.
- (d) Language barriers and lack of knowledge of the Greek society. The Greek state has not set up a system of teaching Greek as a foreign language to migrants and refugees, so as to facilitate their integration.
- (e) Cultural differences.
- (f) Religion. It is harder for the local communities to endorse people from a different religious background (e.g. Muslims).
- (g) The distorted image of mass media and social networks.
- (h) Lack of vocational training, especially during the crisis.
- (i) Under-utilisation of funding resources from European and international organisations.

#### 4.2.2. *Challenges to be addressed*

The lack of long-term central planning and of coherent and effective integration policies regarding migrants and refugees (with the active involvement of the local government and the local communities) has been stressed by almost all our interviewees. A 'regular' and not circumstantial policy is required, with synergies between the various authorities involved in the integration process, rather than the fragmentary approach that prevails, which leads to inconsistencies. All our interlocutors emphatically pointed out that the biggest challenge that needs to be addressed is the lack of co-ordination and co-operation between all the stakeholders involved in the integration process, whilst one interviewee also mentioned as a problem the central administration's inertia.

The availability of the appropriate legislative framework on integration so as to comply with the formal obligations that Greece has as a European country is not enough; what is more important is to implement the legislation and to improve the living conditions of migrants and refugees, help their integration and allow them to

enjoy the same rights as everyone and gain a perspective in their lives. The European policies do not help towards that direction, as the EU has opted for the securitisation approach (“let’s put them all in prison”). As an interviewee reminded us, when the first wave of migrants and refugees arrived in Greece, the European approach was that of establishing controlled reception centres.

As one interviewee put it, although Greece is faced with systemic challenges on the issue of migration, other than the *Migrants’ Integration Councils*<sup>53</sup>, the administrative bureaucracy lacks the tools that would evaluate the integration initiatives implemented so far, map the unmet needs and suggest new policies. At the level of the central administration, such a tool would be the establishment and operation of an inter-ministerial body that would coordinate efficiently, develop synergies and design policies. The institutional framework already exists (Law 4251/14), but at the moment there is only an informal mapping team involving 11 ministries, coordinated by the Direction of Social Inclusion.

#### *(a) Asylum procedures and legalisation process*

The reception services treat all newly arrived migrants and refugees alike, without making any distinctions. The term “illegal migrants” is not used by the authorities anymore, who instead use the term “undocumented migrants” to describe the migrants and refugees without legal documents (thus focusing on the act and not on the person).<sup>54</sup>

According to one interviewee, there are three distinct procedures regarding asylum, the regular one, the faster one and the procedure at the borders. There are big delays in asylum granting, sometimes reaching a whole year. This delay creates insecurity to asylum-seekers regarding the outcome of their application, and, even though recognized asylum-seekers have access to the labour market, they

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53. There are only 11 MICs in 10 municipalities in the country.

54. For a detailed explanation of the use of the terms “illegal” and “undocumented” migrants see UNHCR terminology leaflet (in Greek): [https://www.unhcr.org/cy/wp-content/uploads/sites/41/2018/09/TerminologyLeafletGREEK\\_PICUM.pdf](https://www.unhcr.org/cy/wp-content/uploads/sites/41/2018/09/TerminologyLeafletGREEK_PICUM.pdf)

face problems as they cannot have access to the public services of their country of origin in order to adduce necessary supporting documents, e.g. vocational training certificates etc., so that they can enjoy specific rights and benefits and have access to health, accommodation and employment.

The legal framework regarding foreign residents (*Aliens Right*) has changed and detention cannot take place as a preventive measure for security reasons, but only in view of returning migrants back to the sending country or their country of origin. To Ombudsman view, the deprivation of freedom should only be used as a last resort measure. As for asylum-seekers, in order to cut short the lengthy process, interviews using Skype have been suggested, but it is not known how well this system has worked.

Another important point that was raised by most of our interlocutors is the conviction that the process of integration of documented migrants has been thrashed aside because of the refugee crisis, since the migration authorities cannot devote time on that issue. As an interviewee pointed out, most of the funding that is made available to help with the integration of migrants and refugees is now directed to the reception process rather than the integration process.

*(b) Over-burdened state infrastructure (healthcare, education, accommodation)*

Refugees living on the islands, where there is only one hospital or health centre that serves both the local population and the thousands of refugees and migrants, are faced with a gruesome situation and conflicts often occur between the members of the local society and refugees, which undermine social peace.

As for the integration of refugee children in the school environment, there is no infrastructure (interpreters, particularly for Arabic and Urdu speakers), that would facilitate the smooth integration of these children in the class. Long delays are been recorded because this process had to be planned in coordination with the Regional Education Directories.



*(c) Living conditions and access to basic rights and services*

Living conditions at the Reception and Identification Centres and hotspots are extremely dire, exacerbated by the access failure to health services. Hotspots are located in the islands of Eastern Aegean (Samos, Lesbos, Kos), while Hospitality Centres on the mainland are temporary structures (containers) or camps. The state has no obligation to provide accommodation to migrants, and, therefore, they should find it themselves or through their networks. There were a few programmes for refugees, by Municipalities and other agencies, providing accommodation solutions, but the main concern is access to decent accommodation.

A UNHCR **accommodation** scheme has been in place since November 2015, primarily dedicated to asylum seekers eligible for relocation, and including Dublin-II family reunification candidates and vulnerable applicants since July 2016. This housing programme called ESTIA<sup>55</sup>, runs in cooperation with various NGOs and Municipalities (e.g. Athens and Thessaloniki), and it has given incentives to house owners to rent their houses to migrants and refugees, and thus avoid their ghettoisation in certain neighbourhoods. However, it is not enough to place those people in a neighbourhood; additional measures are needed to help them integrate into the urban tissue. The scheme is targeted to the older cohorts of asylum seekers; the newcomers do not have access to accommodation once they are allowed to leave the hotspot and accommodation centres. So, there are different speeds and different measures for the accommodation of migrants and refugees.

In terms of access to **employment**, authorised migrants can benefit from a system implemented by the Decentralised Authorities that collects job requests at the area of their competencies and forwards them to the various embassies. By contrast, migrants whose status has not been definitively defined cannot work legally; because

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55. The scheme is funded by the European Commission through DG ECHO. On October 1, 2019 21,442 refugees and asylum seekers were accommodated in urban apartments in various Greek cities, through this housing programme. See UNHCR Factsheet: <http://estia.unhcr.gr/en/estia-accommodation-capacity-weekly-update-1-october-2019/>

of long delays in issuing or renewing residence permits, they are forced to work illegally in order to survive. In order for migrants to be able to renew their residence permit, they must prove that they have been employed for a specific number of days, as work is a prerequisite for their social insurance, and, sometimes, for their access to health services. As for asylum-seekers, a critical problem they are faced with is that their academic and professional skills cannot be recorded at the registration stage.

First generation migrants face difficulties in communication (language barriers), owing to the fact that there were only few Greek language teaching programmes, and these were not implemented effectively or people could not attend them. By contrast, there is no problem for second generation migrants or for the integration of their children in the school environment.

#### *(d) Attitude of EU countries and authorities*

By providing the institutional and legislative framework through regulations and directives, and by granting funding resources, the EU authorities can contribute to assisting and supporting migrants and refugees, since, in collaboration with national states, they are responsible for planning. To this end, the role of the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) is also important.

Central and local authorities should cooperate, because the central state is responsible for the policy formulation and local authorities can undertake initiatives to support the integration of migrants and refugees, especially through the social services provided by municipalities.

#### *(e) Role of the NGOs*

Both at the national and the supranational level, NGOs can contribute, through programmes that will help migrants and refugees integrate in the local communities, and also help them obtain language skills and contribute to their access to basic rights and services, such as healthcare, accommodation, education and employment.

*(f) Exploitation of migrants and refugees by peoples' smugglers and organised crime*

Due to the lack of communication skills and the lack of adequate information provision regarding their rights, migrants and refugees may become victims of smugglers, organised crime members, local community residents, as well as lawyers.

*(g) Interaction with the local communities*

The steady influx of migrants was a constant until 2015, when the numbers rocketed to unprecedented levels. Whilst previous cohorts of migrants were gradually settling down, and the local population was becoming familiar with their presence, the refugee crisis created an inverse momentum and the first signs of islamophobia appeared, according to one interviewee. The negative attitudes of the population are not limited only to Greek-born residents, according to an interviewee; often they are also characteristic of migrants who live in Greece for many years.

The attitude of local communities is not uniform of course and should be judged per case. It often depends on the organised civil society. Some communities are xenophobic and introverted, particularly regarding the school enrolment of migrant and refugee children. As one interviewee reminded us, in the past there have been huge controversies on the question whether a migrant or refugee student is entitled to hold the Greek flag in the National Day parades.

These hostile reactions are often fuelled by the negative portrayal of refugees and migrants in the media and the social networks, which incite xenophobic reflexes to the local communities; by contrast, when local populations get into contact with foreigners, or collaborate and work with them, their perspective changes.

*(h) Uncertainty about the future*

All these problems make migrants and refugees feel uncertain about their future in general, in every sector. In particular, the main fear of refugees is the outcome of their asylum application and the possibility of its rejection, while for migrants, it is the delay in the re-

newal of residence permits that incites a feeling of fear to them and excludes them from access to various services.

#### 4.2.3. *Suggestions-recommendations*

Integration is a matter of policy initiatives, as well as of political will. A systemic approach with a long-term perspective at the administrative and legislative levels, is called for, in the form of an *Action Plan* that will make the best use of available resources<sup>56</sup>, take into account the pre-existing knowledge in terms of mapping and recommendations, assign responsibilities and be subject of assessment. But, integration is also, and most importantly, a European issue. As an interviewee suggested, a European Commissioner for Inclusion who can interact with local stakeholders, would enhance the integration process in all the EU countries (provided, of course, that *there is* a European policy regarding the integration of migrants and refugees, as another interviewee pointed out).

Integration policies need to be specific, coherent and tailored to the particular needs of the various sub-categories of migrants and refugees (e.g. old vs. new migrants), and address the broad spectrum of integration policies (healthcare, education, employment, housing, rights and obligations, adjustment to the local social life and cultural rules): “we should move away from both the emergency approach and the solidarity approach”, as one interviewee put it. The same person firmly believes that a change of perspective of the migration phenomenon is necessary, an approach that views it not as a European or a national problem, but as something inherent in human history. This implies an internal reflective process, both within Europe and Greece. It also requires -since we ask for solidarity from the other European countries- a mandatory system of distributing the migrants and refugees within Greece as well. The collective memory of a local community can help in this respect: if it has received refugee populations in the past, it can receive them again.

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56. An interviewee from an international NGO gave the example of Turkey, which uses EU funding to build clinics for migrants and then exploits the human capital of immigrants by staffing these clinics e.g. with Syrian doctors.



A point that was raised by an interviewee brings to the fore the delicate issue of the socially excluded and vulnerable people in Greece that are neither migrants nor refugees, who feel left out from the integration process and have to compete for the limited state resources, thus inciting social tensions.

More specific recommendations have also been put forward by the interviewees, regarding the different areas of integration.

Improvements in the **legislative framework** are a priority, so that migrants and refugees are entitled the same opportunities as the native population. To this end, the transformation of the **administrative culture** is imperative so that migrants and refugees are not treated as 'second class' citizens and their rights are protected. **Synergies** between the central government and the local authorities are of crucial importance too, in view of implementing effective integration policies and avoiding inconsistencies. **Living conditions**, particularly for asylum-seekers at hotspots, must be drastically improved. Overcrowded camps like the RIC in Moria, where almost 13,000 people are crammed in facilities which are for 3,000 people, create grave problems, such as health issues, diseases, epidemics etc.

Access to **employment, healthcare and social services** is a prerequisite for a successful integration. Support services in particular, such as access to healthcare, cultural mediation, interpretation, legal aid, psychosocial support, should be made available, especially for victims of torture and trafficking, as well as for people with disabilities.

Learning the **Greek language** is a crucial tool for the integration of migrants and refugees in local communities, and the Greek State should move very quickly towards organising courses in the Greek language, as well as in the Greek culture. At the same time, the Greek State should work with migrants and refugees speaking both Greek and their maternal language as cultural mediators, interpreters and tutors, to help with the integration of less educated, in terms of language skills, migrants and refugees. This will facilitate employment policies for second generation people, and help the state respond to emergencies and other needs (medical etc.) of people who do not speak the Greek language yet. It will also contribute to the integration of new entrants.

Access to education in the broad sense is also significant, as it can help not only the foreign populations that wish to integrate, but also the Greek citizens, to tolerate diversity, to become familiar with the history of other people and to understand migratory movements over time, thus making it easier for them to accept the integration of migrants and refugees in the Greek society.

Last but not least, greater sensitivity and responsibility on behalf of media on migration issues is required.

### *Suggestions of the young migrant to improve integration policies*

At the general policy level, there needs to be a more systematic effort and coordination among different organisations. Local people should try to get in contact with the newcomers, beyond the barriers of colour, religion etc. Human contact is necessary and natural and at the same time it is an advantage that a country like Greece has, in contrast with Germany.

Regarding access to employment, there needs to be a campaign addressed to employers and at the same time to improve migrants' skills. Furthermore, employers should be mobilised and get in touch with NGOs expertise in the field, in order to benefit from existing migrants' skills and professional experience.

In the area of education, all authorities and organisations concerned should immediately collaborate for the systematic provision of Greek language courses to migrants and refugees. It would be better to organise mixed classes with students of Greek and non-Greek origin. The Greek language should also be taught in the camps, in order for the children to be able to attend Greek schools.

Finally, media discourses should stop dispersing negative stereotypes (e.g. portraying foreigners as 'rapists' or 'terrorists', or claiming that migrants are taking jobs from unemployed Greeks) which generate racist attitudes. Migrants and refugees are also taxpayers and make a significant contribution to the national economy and this should be acknowledged.

#### 4.2.4. *Concluding remarks*

The legislative framework regarding the integration of both migrants and asylum-seekers appears to be satisfactory, but it remains problematic in terms of implementation. There are long delays, especially in the renewal of residence permits of long-established migrants, since there are no automatic mechanisms for renewal. Those who are in the process of authorisation cannot work, thus fuelling informal or undeclared work and tax evasion. Refugees and migrants face particular difficulties in accessing health and housing services, either in terms of legal limitations or in terms of prejudices and problems caused by the Central Administration that denies them access. Furthermore, migrants and refugees often cannot have access to the public services of their country of origin, and, thus, cannot certify any capacities or skills that they may have acquired, and hence become entitled to rights and services in the host country. Finally, access to employment is difficult for migrants and refugees not only owing to the language barriers, but also if they lack appropriate education or if they cannot certify their vocational qualifications. As a result, they often become victims of labour exploitation.

A diversified, well thought, solid integration system is required, one for the long-established migrants, and another for the new arrivals. A system with simple and clear rules that are supported by the state authorities and that can be adjusted to changing circumstances: “you need time, money and people” as an interviewee put it. The issue of limited material and human resources was also raised by other interviewees, who believe that the process of integration would be greatly enhanced if there was more funding for the centrally designed policies and a significant increase in the personnel involved. To this end, efforts are made for EU funds to go through the Ministry (for the year 2020), unlike what has been happening so far, when the largest part has been directed to UNHCR, NGOs etc.

Not all interviewees share the same view on the prospects of the integration process in Greece. A bleaker perspective on the issue of integration, but on the prospects of the country as well, was given by one of our interlocutors who believes that the issue of integra-

tion is closely related to the structural problems of the Greek state: “these people live in Greece...the fate is the same, but it’s a little worse for migrants than for Greeks, since they have no voice”. And he adds: “following missions in various countries, when I came to Greece, I never imagined that I would find this situation. Complicated and old-fashioned processes, corruption, bureaucracy... The system is rotten. A system that does not work neither for Greeks nor for migrants. There is no hope in this country.”

Despite the pessimistic approach of many front-line activists and policy makers regarding the future prospects of the integration process, it remains that changes in the institutional framework regarding the integration of older cohorts of migrants are urgently needed. Changes that will ensure that access to rights and benefits does not depend on nationality, but on the fact that these people are long-term migrants in Greece. Better implementation of the legislation will lead to better results, if all authorities involved cooperate with each other. The contribution of the local government is significant and necessary, since it constitutes the competent body to execute all policies and procedures that will help with the integration, and provide feedback to the central state.

Integration is an issue of great concern for migrants and refugees. However, cultural differences with the Greek population should always be taken into account, and integration should be facilitated, while respecting all aspects that could easily become reasons for discrimination, for example migrants and refugees should never be asked to deny their origin, culture or religion.

An in-depth discussion as to the characteristics and content of a national integration system is a matter of utmost priority, taking into consideration the overall geopolitical context, the fragile state of the Greek economy, the demographic ageing of the indigenous population and the complexity of the mixed migratory flows.



### 4.3. Key findings from the Focus Group Discussion

A Focus Group Discussion was held at the National Centre for Social Research headquarters on September 25, 2019, with the aim of assessing the integration process of migrants and refugees in Greece, through the eyes of major stakeholders, such as representatives from the General Secretariat for Migration Policy, the Special Service for the Co-ordination and Management of AMIF Programmes, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), Caritas Hellas and the Greek Forum of Refugees. A total of 6 persons took part in a three-hour long stimulating and informative discussion that was co-ordinated by members of the research team and recorded with the consent of the participants. Our main findings are presented below.

#### 4.3.1. Assessment of the integration process

Integration, according to our interlocutor from the central administration, is a key concept connoting mutual respect, recognition of rights, but also adjustment and will to integrate on behalf of migrants themselves. So far, a lot has been done at the level of services, facilities and commitment on the part of EU authorities and millions of euro have been spent. A major initiative has been the establishment of the Migrants Integration Councils at the local level (10 in total), with the participation of migrants. Their main activities include Greek language courses, employment promotion and various activities involving both migrant and native-born children.

The main pieces of legislation regarding the integration of migrants and refugees include the *Migration and Social Integration Code* (Law 4251/2014), the *National Strategy for the Inclusion of Third-country Citizens, 2015-2019*, and the *National Strategy for Inclusion*, launched earlier this year, that, for the first time, is also addressed to asylum-seekers and persons in need of international protection.

The process of integration has improved over the years, according to a participant, but it still suffers from inconsistencies and setbacks, like in the case of the right to vote, the suspension of the issuance of a Social Security Registration Number (AMKA), and the erratic school enrolment of refugee children, not to mention the se-

rious delays in the asylum procedure, especially in making an appointment with the Asylum Service.<sup>57</sup> A long-standing problem that was also pointed out is that often the authorities cannot make the distinction between a migrant and a refugee.

Regarding the earlier cohorts of migrants, a process of 'self-integration' has taken place, as a participant pointed out, giving several examples of successful self-integration though finding a job, learning the language, becoming an entrepreneur, etc. The key to their success was their eagerness to integrate. He also gave counter-examples of Pakistani migrants who do not wish to integrate; they want to go back home and they send all their money to their families left behind.

### *Major obstacles encountered by migrants and refugees*

The several barriers to a successful integration of migrants and refugees that emerged from the Focus Group Discussion, broadly relate to the institutional framework in place, the structural problems of the Greek economy and the subjective and practical problems daily encountered by migrants and refugees. A list follows:

#### **Institutional barriers**

- Lack of a central integration plan involving all stakeholders, as well as lack co-ordination between the competent authorities
- Loss of access to a Tax Identification Number (TIN) and a Social Security Registration Number (AMKA)<sup>58</sup>
- Difficulty in the recognition of educational qualifications of migrants and refugees
- Under-functioning and under-financing of the Migrants' Integration Councils
- Lengthy legalisation procedures
- Discontinuities and amateurism in the integration initiatives

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57. According to a participant, sometimes, asylum-seekers are so exasperated by the long delays that they decide to give themselves up to the police, in order to speed up the process.

58. The new requirements regarding third-country nationals' entitlement to AMKA were announced in November 2019 but have only recently come into force.

### Structural problems

- Limited resources of local authorities
- High unemployment rate, for both natives and migrants.

### Subjective barriers

- Language, cultural and communication barriers
- Poor health status and mental health problems (“an unresolved issue”)
- Difficulties in having a permanent address
- Impact of fake news dispersed
- Uncertainty about the future, unwillingness to integrate.

### *Factors that contribute to a successful integration*

According to the Focus Group participants, the factors that can contribute the most to the successful integration of migrants and refugees include the following:

- Easier access to decent housing and paid employment. The Catholic organisation Caritas runs a community shelter project in Athens (Neos Kosmos), for vulnerable migrants and refugees, that encourages their interaction and osmosis with the neighbourhood. The beneficiaries can stay for 12 to 18 months.<sup>59</sup> In the area of employability, the same organisation runs the pilot project ‘Livelihoods’, aiming -amongst other things- at preparing recognised refugees for entering the Greek labour market (with the collaboration of an experienced Greek recruiting agency); it has also developed an online platform and an application to help refugees and migrants get information about training and employment opportunities and thus come to grips with the labour market reality.<sup>60</sup> Caritas Hellas also operates 4 Social Spots (Centres for Social Inclusion

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59. For further details see: <https://caritas.gr/en/intervention-en/accommodation/>

60. For further details see: <https://caritas.gr/en/intervention-en/economic-integration/>

and Employability) (3 in Athens and one in Thessaloniki), that provide a variety of services (work counselling, training courses, Greek language classes, seminars, psychological counselling and intercultural activities) to migrants and refugees.<sup>61</sup>

- Language competence. Informal language courses for adults can help migrants and refugees overcome the barriers in communication. A positive example is the 'Piraeus Open School for Migrants' established in 2005 in view of providing educational and training support to migrants and refugees residing in Greece. The Open School is run exclusively by volunteers and it provides classes during the weekend to migrants and refugees from every ethnic and religious background. At present, there are 15 classes attended by 700 to 800 students.
- Integration courses. The programme HELIOS<sup>62</sup> launched by IOM in June 2019, offers integration courses to recognised refugees (beneficiaries of international protection currently residing in temporary accommodation schemes) within the 'Integration Learning Centres', as a nudge towards their integration, after they have gone through the emergency stage and the asylum claim. Each course cycle lasts for 6 months and consists of modules on Greek language learning, cultural orientation, job readiness and life skills. The emphasis of the programme (which runs until November 2020) is on encouraging mutual cultural understanding, acquiring soft skills and empowering the beneficiaries in 3 areas: accommodation, education and employability. In the area of accommodation, it supports beneficiaries towards independent accommodation in apartments rented in their name, whilst in the area of employability, the programme provides individual employability and job readiness support, including through job counselling, access to job-

61. These initiatives are part of the project «METAVASIS Project – Participation, Empowerment and Social Inclusion of Refugees / Migrants in Greece» run by Caritas Hellas and funded by Caritas Germany, and the project “Social and Economic Integration of Refugees and Immigrants in Athens” funded by Caritas Switzerland. See: <https://caritas.gr/en/intervention-en/social-inclusion-en/social-inclusion/>

62. A pilot project funded by the Directorate General Migration and Home Affairs of the European Commission (DG HOME).



related certifications and networking with private employers. The programme also monitors and assesses the integration progress of the beneficiaries, to ensure that they will be in a position to confidently navigate through Greek public service providers once they will exit from the HELIOS pilot project and start living independently in Greece.<sup>63</sup> So far, around 2,500 recognised refugees attend the integration courses.

- School enrolment of migrant and refugee children. The role of the ‘Coordinators for the Education of Refugees’ is crucial in providing access to education to children living in accommodation camps, but also in bringing together refugees with the local population (“an integrated person is one who has friends from the local communities”).
- Improving every-day life in the accommodation sites. A positive initiative brought to the light during the Focus Group Discussion is the IOM programme ‘Improving the Greek Reception System through Site Management Support and Targeted Interventions in Long-Term Accommodation Sites’, implemented in all the mainland open accommodation facilities (28 in total). The ‘Site Management Support’ programme provides psychological and legal support, interpretation services, child protection and the creation of safe spaces for children and women living in the camps. It also provides non-formal education to children (homework support classes) and adults (Greek and English classes) inside the camps, whilst it manages ‘Safe Zones’ within selected sites for the protection of Unaccompanied Migrant Children, to ensure maintenance, provision of food and non-food items, recreational activities and specialized legal and psychosocial support.<sup>64</sup> A similar initiative to improve everyday life in the camps is the ‘Emergency Response Plan’ run by Caritas Hellas inside five refugee accommodation sites, targeted at both men and women refugees (“Men’s Space”, Women’s Safe Spaces).

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63. See also: <https://greece.iom.int/en/hellenic-integration-support-beneficiaries-international-protection-helios>

64. See also: <https://greece.iom.int/en/improving-greek-reception-system-through-site-management-support-and-targeted-interventions-long>

- Access to accommodation. The programme ESTIA is a short-term solution for recognised refugees but it cannot help their integration as they have to move out from the apartments after 6 months.
- Availability of cash. The cash assistance (provided by UNHCR to eligible refugees and asylum-seekers, as part of the ESTIA programme) restores dignity and empowers asylum-seekers and refugees who can choose how to cover their basic needs<sup>65</sup>; cash assistance has also contributed to eliminate the sexual exploitation of children, as one participant pointed out.
- Resolution of the implementation problems related to integration policies and simplification of asylum and legalisation procedures.
- Greater involvement of the migrants and refugees themselves in policy design.
- The *National Strategy for Inclusion* launched earlier this year, is a great tool for integration as it organises the disperse activities and sets priorities. The establishment of the Asylum Service and of local government initiatives such as the Co-ordination Centres for Migrants and Refugees also contribute to facilitate the integration progress of earlier and newer cohorts of migrants and refugees.

#### 4.3.2. Major challenges to be addressed

- Perhaps the single most pressing problem to be addressed is the emergency situation prevailing in the accommodation sites in the Aegean islands, owing to the increased influx of migrants and refugees. The further deterioration of living conditions in the camps disrupts the daily routine of the camp residents and cancels out all previous efforts to integrate migrants and refugees and connect them to the outside world, as a participant pointed out.
- The suspension of the automatic issuance of a Social Security Registration Number (AMKA) for third-country nationals

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65. See: <http://estia.unhcr.gr/en/greece-cash-assistance-february-2019/>

poses a major health risk, not only for the vulnerable migrant and refugee populations (especially the children) who cannot have access to health-care services unless it is an emergency, but also for the local communities. The first big problems have already appeared, especially regarding the vaccination of children in order to attend school, which is a pre-requisite for their enrolment.

- The health of migrants and refugees is also compromised by the vastly inadequate healthcare services in the accommodation sites, especially at the RIC of Moria and the camp in Malakasa, a risk further exacerbated by the scores of “spontaneous arrivals”.
- Though considerable, the available funding to address the continued influx of refugees and migrants falls short of the growing needs. It is expected that more funds will be made available during the next programming period through AMIF.
- A major shift in the allocation of funds has been recorded following the refugee crisis in 2015. As the participant from the agency that manages AMIF funding pointed out, in the context of the National Programme 2014-2020, 300 million euro have been allocated to Greece towards reception and asylum needs, and only 30 million euro towards the integration of migrants.<sup>66</sup> As a result, earlier migrants feel neglected: “they have forgotten us!”.
- Regarding the school enrolment of migrant and refugee children, significant problems persist, exacerbated by the recent change in government that delayed the recruitment of qualified teachers and the process of transportation of children from the accommodation sites care of IOM<sup>67</sup>. For this reason, according to an informed participant, around 5,000 school-age children

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66. The AMIF’s mission is to support Greek national efforts to improve reception capacities, ensure that asylum procedures are in line with EU standards, integrate migrants at local and regional levels and increase the effectiveness of return programmes. See: [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/201902\\_managing-migration-eu-financial-support-to-greece\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/201902_managing-migration-eu-financial-support-to-greece_en.pdf)

67. In 2018, IOM transferred 4,600 migrant and refugee children to their school;

of a refugee and migrant background were left out of school, at the time of the focus group discussion, putting “their school year at risk”, whilst secondary-school students might lose the year because of absences. School attendance is occasionally also disrupted in some areas by local residents who are hostile to the enrolment of migrant and refugee children in the same school as their own children.

- Unaccompanied children are left with no support and protection once they reach the age of 18. As a participant put it: “what happens to these young adults?”.
- As the accommodation scheme ESTIA is coming towards the end and the rent market in the large cities is very adverse, there will soon be thousands of homeless refugees, whose vulnerability might be exploited.
- Some beneficiaries of integration programmes do not want to stay in Greece and to integrate, owing to the uncertainty about the future. Many are not even aware of their rights and obligations as residents of Greece.

#### 4.3.3. *Suggestions for the improvement of the integration process*

As all participants have a hands-on experience of the various aspects of the integration process in Greece, the loopholes and the contradictions, they put forward a number of recommendations to improve the process in most of the policy areas.

- As the participant with the migrant background suggested, the integration strategy requires a bottom-up approach from the migrant communities (who in the past were not at all involved), the local communities and the civil society organisations, to the local government, all the way up to the central administration
- Need for a National Master Plan covering reception, asylum and integration policies. Integration policies need to be re-de-

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(September 2019). At the time of the focus group discussion (September 2019), it was reported that only 600 children attended school, transferred by their own means or courtesy of local governments.



signed to ensure stability, sustainability and a long-term time frame, and focus more on inclusion (the example of Germany was mentioned by one participant)

- Inter-ministerial coordination, institutionalised co-operation with all the stakeholders involved in the integration process, resolution of the implementation problems, simplification of procedures
- EU regulations must be adapted to the Greek reality
- A lighter system of management of funds
- Strengthening of the Migrants' Integration Councils (that are at a stalemate, according to a participant) with recruitment of additional staff. The recruitment process is already under way in 9 of the 13 Regions of the country and the cost of the personnel will be funded by the Regional Operational Programmes
- Participation of local governments in integration programmes
- Increase in the number of support programmes like ESTIA, HELIOS, cash assistance, etc.
- Issuing of a Health Card for all migrants and refugees
- Reception classes for school-age children and non-formal education for the adult population. An educational framework is required that will provide uniform study programmes and cover the loopholes. As a participant put it: "The best integration tool for parents is their children"
- Elimination of language barriers, through extensive classes in the Greek language
- Acquisition of the *European Qualification Passport* (European Skills Toolkit) and full mapping of the educational and skills profile of migrants and refugees
- Substantial increase in the number of cultural mediators and certification of their skills
- Toolkit for cultural mediators to assist in the diagnosis of mental health problems
- Early identification of vulnerable groups, through the use of an information system
- Development of a system (e.g. an application) that will provide holistic information to migrants and refugees, with re-

gard to their rights and obligations, so that they do not fall victim of the fake news spread around by people's smugglers. Cultural mediators can play a key role in this respect.

#### *4.3.4. Concluding remarks*

Despite the undeniable progress recorded in the process of integration over the years, and the channelling of considerable funds, there persist significant inconsistencies and set-backs. The most problematic policy areas relate to the absence of a coherent, long-term strategic plan for the integration of migrant and refugees, the lack of co-ordination between the various stakeholders, the huge delays in the legalisation and asylum procedures, and the limited administrative capacity.

A major shift has been recorded in recent years from integration policies to reception policies, as the vast majority of funds and policy initiatives is now directed towards addressing the problems of recent migrants and refugees arriving in Greece from war and violence-stricken zones, forcing the earlier cohorts of migrants to look after themselves, to 'self-integrate'. At the same time, the vulnerable population in Greece continues to grow, as new groups of materially deprived and socially excluded people fall into this category, whilst policy responses fall short of addressing their pressing needs.

#### *4.4. Summary of main findings of the empirical research*

1. The gradual improvements in the institutional framework on integration have contributed to the access of migrants and refugees to basic rights and services, but the implementation of a holistic and coherent integration policy still lags behind. Long-established migrants face serious problems with their legal status as there are long delays and discontinuities in the renewal of residence permits, and those who are in the process of authorisation cannot work, thus often falling victim of labour exploitation. Changes in the institutional framework regarding the integration of older cohorts of migrants are ur-

gently needed, so as to ensure that access to rights and benefits does not depend on nationality, but on the fact that these people are long-term migrants in Greece.

2. A major shift has been recorded in recent years from integration policies to reception policies. The vast majority of EU funds, as well as of policy measures, is now directed towards addressing the problems of recent migrants and refugees arriving in Greece from war and violence-stricken zones, thrashing aside the problems of the earlier cohorts of migrants and forcing them to look after themselves, to 'self-integrate'.
3. Although many of the basic needs of asylum-seekers are being covered, the degree of integration is minimal. The uncertainty about the future, the communication difficulties, the lack of employment opportunities, the contradictory information on their rights, poor healthcare and social services and security issues, add to the exasperation of asylum-seekers and compromise their integration prospects.
4. The most important factors that contribute to the integration process of migrants and refugees include their empowerment, the provision of clear information on the institutional framework, stability of interventions and security. Equally important is the support from the local community formal and informal networks and access to socio-psychological support services from the very first moment of the arrival of migrants and refugees. Special care should be given to the needs of children and adolescents, both accompanied by their families or unaccompanied.
5. An in-depth discussion as to the characteristics and the content of a national integration system is a matter of utmost priority, taking into consideration the threatening geopolitical context, the fragile state of the Greek economy, the demographic ageing of the indigenous population and the complexity of the mixed migratory flows.