

5. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. *Shortcomings and pitfalls*

The desk and the qualitative research have shed light on the main *shortcomings and pitfalls* in the Greek migration and reception policies that need to be addressed.

- The Greek legislative and institutional framework on the integration of migrants and refugees is ineffective because it provides for a system of legal migration which is hard to enforce and which leads to the abuse of migrants' rights. Greece's migration policy does not aim at and does not invest in the integration of migrants because it is ambiguous and contradictory.
- The active inclusion of the principles of integration into the administrative practices should be pursued, rather than an approach consisting of "inaction" or "omission" policies - as it has been repeatedly emphasized in EKKE's qualitative surveys. Only then will a coherent, integrated, multifunctional and mutually acceptable organisational concept of integration be formed, the convergence of policies goals and objectives with practices will be strengthened and a common organisational plan for the integration of third-country nationals into Greek society will be developed.
- The lack of strategic action plans, of sustainable measures and of prioritisation of policies lead to the overlapping and ineffectiveness of policies. The political agenda lacks realism in tackling the migration question. Moreover, the compartmentalisation of knowledge and policies prevails, as the design and implementation of the migration policy is fragmented in

a large number of public agencies, government departments, bureaus and organisations. Only one fifth of those agencies provide services exclusively to immigrants.

- The lack of cooperation and coordination of services across all administrative levels has greatly contributed to the adoption of conflicting practices by the administration. As EKKE research shows, civil servants often downplay the issue of coordination and other service-related problems, often attributing them to migrants' ignorance, their suspicion of public administration and the difficulty of communication.
- The combination of gaps and ambiguities in the legislative framework, a reluctant administration and the absence of strong political will to tackle the issue of migration create a dysfunctional framework for implementing migrant policy, which does not and cannot address the realities and the needs of a coherent society, the state and the migrants themselves.
- With regard to the integration of women migrants, existing legislation lacks a gender perspective; women do not constitute a distinct target group and their multiple roles are not highlighted.
- The legalisation process is flawed, mostly owing to the rigid legal requirements in order to be eligible for a residence permit in the country. As a result, the risk of de-legalisation of migrants is great and constant, and the opportunities to reinstate/return to legality few, mainly due to the impact of the financial crisis on employment and the direct link between legal residence and work permit.
- There is no comprehensive legal framework that ensures the basic rights to all migrants and refugees whose asylum application has not been definitively rejected, especially unaccompanied children and migrant children of undocumented migrants, the two most vulnerable groups.
- Another area in which integration problems appear to be acute is access to healthcare and welfare services, as it depends on the legal status of migrants, a formal legality which restricts the basic right of all people in need, to health and protection of life.

5.2. *Areas of improvement*

- Simplification of the procedures for legalising migrants who meet the requirements. Disconnection - subject to conditions - of the residence permit from the work permit. This change would make it easier for migrants to retain their legal status in times of recession. To this end, a permanent mechanism for restoring legitimacy must be created.
- Adoption of best practices successfully implemented in other EU countries, adjusted to the Greek conditions. EKKE has made proposals for the expansion and better organisation of “one stop shops”, the better use of cultural mediators and the implementation of ‘Back-End Offices’ for the networking and coordination of all communication and information channels.
- Empowerment of the public administration and front-line services who handle migration issues with trained and qualified staff, and expertise knowledge.
- Establishment of reception and information mechanisms for migrants and refugees, to address their lack of information on their rights and obligations, the competent authorities and the administrative procedures. Operation of one-stop services to support residence and integration of migrants, through simplified procedures and improved access to public goods and services.
- Improving access to the labour market through specific initiatives, such as: the establishment of a public labour mediation service between migrant workers and their employers; the establishment of an effective mechanism for ex-officio inspections of companies to check their compliance with labour legislation, without the need for prior reporting by the migrant; and the recognition of the educational and professional qualifications and skills of migrants.
- As far as migrant adult education is concerned, it presents more problems than school attendance for children, mainly because of its direct link to the legal status of potential beneficiaries and the temporary and pilot nature of most language learning programs.

- Female migrants suffer from profound and multiple forms of exclusion and discrimination, as compared to male migrants. However, gender, as a parameter of integration, and the barriers that women migrants face are not yet adequately addressed by the Greek state, which is the main agency responsible for the integration of migrants, both male and female.
- With respect to the management of the mixed migratory flows that continue to arrive at the door-step of Greece, a more efficient use of EU funds requires focusing on: (a) accelerating the asylum and relocation procedures, (b) moving the populations stranded in unacceptable conditions in the Aegean islands to more decent accommodation arrangements on the mainland, and (c) facilitating the full integration of those refugees who will be staying in Greece, especially their access to housing, employment and education.
- The right to have access to health care and welfare services must be disconnected from the legal status of migrants and refugees.
- A pressing issue that needs to be addressed is that of combating instances of racial discrimination in the Greek society and administration, in order to ensure equal access for migrants to basic goods and services. Research has revealed that, to some extent, xenophobic behaviour on the part of civil servants continues to exist. The host society is also called upon to change, accepting the cultural particularity of migrants and refugees, and to become more tolerant.

5.3. *Concluding remarks*

1. The absence of a clear and solid legal framework for migration and migrant integration creates a feeling of legal uncertainty for both migrants and public officials, thus burdening the relationship among them and with the Greek society as a whole. It has been argued that the gaps in migration policy are a political choice rather than a “technical” error or legislative failure. It is clear, however, that the legislative production of the

2000s, as well as the legalisation programs, have improved the situation, without fully responding to the challenges. A lot more remains to be done in order to address the complex migration phenomenon.

2. In the absence of formal and coherent integration policies, the early cohorts of migrants in the 1990s went through a process of self-integration, in terms of access to housing, employment, health and education for their children. Access to citizen's rights was granted belatedly and inconsistently, and still constitutes a serious problem. An automatic mechanism for the renewal of residence permits of settled migrants will address the serious gaps in their access to health, employment and social benefits.
3. The lack of coordination and synergies between the various stakeholders involved in the integration process leads to inconsistencies, loopholes and a waste of material and human resources.
4. The huge challenges associated with the management of the recent migration flows proved far beyond the material and administrative capacities of the Greek authorities, whether national, regional or local, increasingly so in the context of the concurrent economic and humanitarian crises that had deeply affected the country until recently.
5. The outburst of the refugee crisis, which culminated in 2015, marks a turning point in integration policies, as almost all of the available funding, the material resources and human capacity are now directed towards dealing with the pressing problems associated with the continuous flows of asylum-seekers by land and sea, thrashing aside the integration of earlier cohorts of migrants. The integration policies have become reception policies.
6. As migratory flows into Greece continue at an increasing pace⁶⁸, the administrative capacity remains over-burdened.

68. According to UNHCR, Greece has received 46,100 of the 81,300 people crossing the Mediterranean Sea during the first 9 months of 2019 – more than Spain, Italy, Malta and Cyprus combined. See: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/72161>

The Asylum Service, the Greek Armed Forces, the Coast Guard, the National Health System cannot effectively cope *ad infinitum*, with their limited resources and capabilities, with an ever-increasing stock of migrants and refugees. The competent authorities need to be equipped with additional resources, managing skills and capabilities; above all, they need to cope with a manageable situation, rather than emergency conditions.

7. The significant EU funds disbursed to the Greek authorities and NGOs to deliver services to recently-arrived migrant and refugee families and to unaccompanied children had a decisive impact on addressing their most urgent needs and on facilitating their first steps towards their integration in the reception country. However, the EU-funded programmes and initiatives cover only a part of the displaced populations and they offer only short-term solutions to the beneficiaries. As a result, once a project is over, the problems re-emerge, and the risk of vulnerability increases.
8. The majority of migrants and refugees arriving in Greece still considers Greece “as a passage” or a transit country. Owing to the considerable delays in the processing of their asylum application, hundreds of thousands of women, men and children (accompanied or not), are living for years in a ‘limbo’ situation, stuck in a country they do not want to be in. The uncertainty about their future fuels their exasperation and compromises the integration process.
9. Unmet medical needs, including mental health issues, constitute a major issue for the displaced populations, as well as for the local communities, in terms of healthcare provision. Children, in particular, are at an increased risk of poor mental health. Early health and especially mental health screening are thus essential and should be a policy priority to the benefit of migrant and public health.
10. No integration process can take place, nor the access to basic rights can be guaranteed, as long as the Greek islands continue to receive scores of new migrants and refugees every day, that worsen the situation in already dangerously overcrowded fa-

cilities there. Urgent measures are needed that will ease the burden on the islands and improve the conditions in the reception facilities. Otherwise, despite the transfers to the mainland, 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 and a source of renewed social tensions.

11. At the EU-level, it is a matter of top priority to clarify the provisions of Dublin-II, reform the common European asylum system, and reinvigorate or re-adjust the controversial EU-Turkey agreement, that has largely degenerated into a mere 'fig-leaf'.
12. European and international authorities should not point a finger against Greece, or just "throw money on the problem". EU countries (especially those from the Visegrad Group) are called upon to show solidarity and take their fair share of migrants and refugees stranded in Greece. Eurostat figures have revealed a backlog of 878,600 requests at the end of 2018, with Germany having the largest share of pending requests (44%), ahead of Italy (12%). The figure comes despite the number of migrant arrivals in Europe practically halving in the last two years. Additionally, the rejection rate for asylum requests in Europe has almost doubled in three years, from 37% in 2016 to 64% in 2019. The German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) has in 2019 rejected three-quarters of family reunification requests from Greece.⁶⁹
13. The Greek economy, barely out of a prolonged economic crisis, cannot absorb so many waves of migrants and refugees. The Greek government must seek to internationalise the problem to the maximum degree, and convince the more powerful European countries (Germany, France) to negotiate with Turkey, in order to reach an understanding, so that migrants and refugees can no longer be used as an alibi to serve other obscure purposes.

69. See article in *The Guardian*: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/aug/25/asylum-seekers-limbo-eu-countries>