



## Report

**Project: Europe4refugees – follow the routes**

**Second short-term learning activity**

**Thessalonica, 23<sup>rd</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> April 2018**

By

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### Attachments:

Media reports - “New Balkan route”  
Program of learning activity



## Introduction

The visit to Thessalonica was the second of total of 7 seminars, so called „short-term learning activities“. This project and comprised seminars are part of program unit “further education for adults” co-financed by Erasmus + in the project “Europe4refugees – follow the routes”. The results would be written down as a protocol at the end of each short-term learning activity. The routes of refugees in Southern, Central, Middle, Western, and Northern Europe are traced throughout this strategic partnership, with the objective – to analyze the situation of refugees and the local support system and collect the best practice experiences. Partners from the fields of migration and adult education meet for short-term qualification trainings, including a three-day seminar event coupled with visits to different institutions, in each participating partner country. There is also a trans-national networking event of the parties involved for collaboration in the future. The project partners from five European countries and the external participants from several German cities arrived to Thessalonica. Vasilis Psychoudakis and Marie Psychoudakis from the host organization “Dialogos” in Thessalonica held a small welcoming speech. Mrs. and Mr. Psychoudakis introduced their NGO and their field of activity. “Dialogos” is very well integrated in the existing network with the other local NGO’s and local stake holders in Thessalonica. Subsequently to their introduction Mr. and Mrs. Psychoudakis introduced the program for the learning activity to all 25 participants.



The participating partners are at the learning activity are:

- Borderline Lesbos and [www.borderline-europe.de](http://www.borderline-europe.de)
- Szubjektiv Ertekek Alapitvany, Budapest/ Hungary, [www.szubjektiv.org/](http://www.szubjektiv.org/)
- Hitzacker/ Dorf eG / Germany, <http://hitzacker-dorf.de>
- EUROMASC Oslo/Norway <http://euromasc.org/>
- La Kasbah, [www.lakasbah.eu/](http://www.lakasbah.eu/)
- Dialogos Thessalonica / Greece, **the host organization**, [www.dialogos.net.gr](http://www.dialogos.net.gr)
- IBB e. V./International Association for Education and Exchange, Dortmund /Germany as General coordinator, [www.ibb-d.de](http://www.ibb-d.de)

External experts from the field of migration and educational work from Germany also took part in the learning activity. The program consisted of two units and this pattern followed throughout all learning activity; in the morning the participants had different local stake holders and visiting contributors talking on the issues of healthcare system, accommodation, education, legal and residence issues etc., at which all of the contributors has the field of expertise. Their presentations would be supported by PowerPoints, in order to convey better understanding of their field of expertise to all the learning activity participants. The afternoon has been reserved for the visits to the local stake holders and NGO’s in the area of Thessalonica.



**Thessalonica, the capital of region of Macedonia, Greece.**

**The place of the second learning activity in the Project “Europe4refugees – follow the routes”**

**Thessalonica – Traditional, multicultural**

The Macedonian city and region of Thessalonica (current population in Metropole: 1.019.940, according to census 2014) has been and remained the city of immigration and emigration. This happened also sometimes under the influence of different political conflicts, such as the one with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The long existing dispute over the name of FYOM has just recently been ended.

The city is situated at the north-western foothill of 1201 m high Chortiatis hills and borders on the Thermaic Gulf. Thessalonica is an important university, cultural, exhibition, industrial and port city. The city is situated in the middle of the century-old north-south and east-west transport routes (via Egnatia). The landmark of city of Thessalonica is the “white tower”. However there also exist numerous early Christian and byzantine churches in a city which has already been mentioned in the Bible by Apostle Paul. Thessalonica is registered on the UNESCO list of world cultural heritage since 1988 and in 1997 the city was the European Cultural Capital. The Greek-orthodox church is the dominant religious community in the city and it has the strong presence in the city’s imagery. The masses, weddings and christenings could be found at almost every corner. Nevertheless the support of the church is absent in the field of help and support for the refugees.

Roughly divided the city lived through Macedonian, Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman era.

### **Macedonian and Roman era**

Thessalonica had been founded in year 315 B.C. by the Macedonian king Kassandros as Thessalonike, by merging of 26 smaller settlements at the location of Therme in the Thermaic Gulf. In its origins this used to be a Thracian settlement. Kassandros von Thessalonike named the settlement after his wife Thessalonike, the stepsister of Alexander the Great. In year 168 B.C. the Roman Empire abolished the Macedonian Kingdom and turned it into the Macedonian Province as a part of Empire, with Thessalonica as a capital of province. Round about the year 300, Thessalonica had been named as one of the emperor’s residences in Roman Empire. This was the reason why it is possible to find very important architectural structure works in Thessalonica, such as Emperor’s Palace, Hippodrome, parallel to the palace, victory arch, which served as a victory monument of emperor Galerius near the via Egnatia, erected after the victory over Sassanids, Rotunda (perhaps a mausoleum or Pantheon), Forum, as well as Agora. Emperor Konstantin would have been later declared as a sole ruler. In year 330 Byzantium had been declared as a capital of the Empire (second Rome) and later named after Emperor Constantine – Constantinople (present Istanbul). The times at which Thessalonica had served as an Emperor’s residence came to an end.



## **Byzantine era**

During the first two centuries of Byzantine rule (560-750) Thessalonica had been repeatedly by the advanced Avars and Slaves unsuccessfully besieged. At the times of Slavic conquests the great parts of Greece were conquered in earlier middle ages. Thessalonica resisted successfully and remained an emperor's staging point. The beginning of 9<sup>th</sup> century oversaw the establishment of the byzantine archontate Thessalonica. The same century marked a long era of peace, during which Thessalonica played a role as a starting point for orthodox Christianization of Slaves. Beside the capital Constantinople, Thessalonica became the second most important city of the imperium.

## **Ottoman era**

In year 1430 Thessalonica would be taken by Sultan Murad II after 2 moth of siege, integrated in the Ottoman Empire and renamed in Selanik. In 17<sup>th</sup> century the city was most important trade center in Balkan. 1821/1822 Ottoman troops had defeated the Greek resistance, which already reported successes in south of Greece, which led to foundation of Kingdom of Greece. In 1908 the revolution of young Turks started in Thessalonica, with Ismail Enver and Mustafa Kemal as their leaders. In 1909 the young Turks have banned the Sultan Abdul Hamid II to Thessalonica and kept him at the Villa Alatini under detention. Thessalonica remained until Balkan wars under Ottoman rule.

## **Escape and eviction during 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

### **20<sup>th</sup> century**

Besides doings and dealings concerning the general situation in whole Greece, such as the end of the kingdom, military dictatorship etc. the key events for the whole city of Thessalonica were the so called "population exchange" and destruction of Jewish population of Thessalonica.

As the WWI ended, Greece waged a war against Turkey from 1919 to 1922. This war ended in defeat of Greece in Little Asia. The result of this defeat was a refugee catastrophe. In Lausanne peace agreement from 1923 a deal has been made on so called "population exchange". The largest part of the Greek refugees from Anatolia settled in and around Thessalonica, at the Chalkidiki peninsula. As a counterpart, the Turkish population left the city towards Anatolia and Izmir. This did not happen without loss of human lives, by setting the whole cities on fire (e.g. Izmir) etc. Therefore this event of "population exchange" should also be seen as a great eviction and uprooting action, undertaken by both sides.

The refugees and evicted persons from Turkey settled in the upper old city at the vicinity of Citadel at the city walls. Their deserted houses are even today visible. According to the reports the attitude of population towards newcomers has not always been polite, at first because the housing and resources in the city were tight after the great fire in 1917. The Muslim newcomers kept to themselves 400 000 Muslim-Turkish Greeks were at that time



evicted and relocated. About 1.2 Millions Anatolian and Pontus Greeks from the Black Sea region, as well as from the regions of Thrace and Macedonia were compulsory relocated.

In the eve of WWII there were about 40 Synagogues in Thessalonica and the city had Jewish community with about 56 000 persons. Therefore, Thessalonica has also been named as “Balkan Jerusalem”, with partially rich fabricants and business people. Archeological findings at the old Jewish cemetery among others are pointing out towards the existence of a Jewish settlement in Thessalonica as early as 2<sup>nd</sup> century. The most of the Jewish population of the city took their origins from Sephardic Jews, who exiled from the Iberian Peninsula (Andalusia, region of Toledo, etc.) in the course of the Reconquista campaigns, triggered through the Alhambra-Edict. The catholic kings (Reyes Catolicos) Isabela I. of Castile and king Ferdinand II. Of Aragon repressed the Muslim-Moorish and Jewish population groups from Andalusia with the use of force away from the region, whereby this would have had an objective of initiation of a Catholic renaissance.

Through these immigrant groups Thessalonica deemed as a largest Sephardic community in Europe. Until 20. Century, Ladino was the dominant language beside Greek and the Jewish population maintained good neighbor relationships to their Christian-Orthodox and Muslim fellow citizens.

From April 1941 to 30.October 1944 Thessalonica was besieged by the German troops within their Balkan campaign. Concentration camp “Pavlos Melas” had been established at one former military camp. Almost all Jewish citizens of Thessalonica have been deported by German occupying forces and their commanding officer Alois Brunner to Auschwitz from March 1943 onwards where most of them were killed. Only about 2000 Jewish citizens survived. Italian embassy employee Guelfo Zamboni distributed in despair about 250 Italian passports on Jewish citizens, in order to protect them from the deportation. Currently the city is inhabited by 1500 Jewish citizens. Jewish Museum has been built in 1997 in context with the Cultural capital of Europe. Beside the Jewish Museum there is also one active Synagogue for Jewish community.

### **Emigration and Remigration during the world economic crises**

Thessalonica suffers even today under the housing shortage, above all about 120 000 students who live in the city and the surrounding area. The housing shortage leads to the raising rents in the shared apartments or in the tiny rooms in the situated in the city’s concrete buildings from 1960’s. Many immigrants as well as Roma families are living in those buildings. During the summer months the conditions in these housings are very hard.

Besides from the work migration from Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Bulgaria, many refugees are also arriving to the city (See the text further below). Prominent Panorama hill with its huge villas at the forested area represents a contrast to the general housing situation. The construction works on the metro in Thessalonica started in 2006 and they are currently continued. After diverse delays over the years the construction of metro should end



in 2020. The impacts of world economic crisis left its footprints not only all over Greece but also in Thessalonica. One can see the predominantly older people as glass or garbage scammers very often. This should work as an attempt to add some extra cash on their low pensions.

Corruption and nepotism are widespread in Greece despite the Tzipras government. “Fakelaki” and “Metakliti” are the terms known to every Greek citizen. If somebody wants to achieve something, he or she should prepare a well-filled envelope and have it always at hand, e.g. for the public administration sector. It is also known, if good relationship to someone close to government is at hand, this could also speed up the process and lead to the achievement of the planned objective. Unfortunately this has not change under the new government. This kind of nepotism presents an obstacle to the fair competition in the country, also for the small education operators and counseling services. The consequences of such approach are visible in the social sphere and also as the means in the work with refugees.

Thessalonica is also well known as a large immigration and emigration region, mainly but not exclusively by Greeks themselves. Emigration and remigration represent together one large demographic factor. About 10 Millions Greeks are living currently in Greece but about 8 Millions are living outside the borders of Greece, mainly in USA, Canada, Australia, South Africa, Latin America and Germany.

The chairperson of Greek-German Association Sigrid Skarpelis-Sperk describes, that about 2 Million people immigrated out of Greece from 1960-1974. In this period Greece had only about 9 Million people. This figure represents about 22% of its whole population. About 1 Million Greeks went to Germany and about 85% of them came from the rural areas, mostly from North Greece and Epirus and most of them landed in blue-collar jobs. As a part of this tendency of the 1960's many people emigrated from Thessalonica in order to work as guest workers in the EU (predominantly in Germany), whereby they supported local economy in Greece through their financial transfers (aid-money). Since the end of the WWII until 1977 about 1.236.290 people left Greece permanently and about 1.197.601 left Greece temporary.

Since 1974 there is an undeniable number of remigrants (Palinostountes), who spent at least a year abroad, above all the relatives of first and second emigrant generations, as well as new migration of the descendants of Greek emigrants, who were born abroad. This also includes the dissidents and the escapees from the end of the military dictatorship. The remigration balance has regularly been larger as the emigration rates and the number grew once again under Andreas Papandreou 1983 in relation to the pensions agreements. The massive unemployment in the 1980's in Germany served as a motor for German government, in order to reduce the number of foreign citizens in the country. The government introduced “The law in support of return willingness of foreign employees” in 1983, which should have support the returnees to their native countries with financial support. About 300 000 foreign employees (ca. 7% of resident foreigners in Germany in 1984) went back to their countries of origin. Many Greek families were among them.





Former remigrants “Pontosgreichen”, who were stamped as colonialists in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century and as such, they moved to the region around Black Sea could be also taken in consideration, beside work migration. The Greek ethnic minority had remigrated from Albania to Greece. The National Institute for remigrated Greek population (E.I.Y.A.P.O.E.) has been established in 1991 as a public administration support unit for this population group.

The immigration from foreign citizens from West Europe and abroad is rare. It is present only in form of season workers from Asia, Poland, Bulgaria etc. The experts are talking about the change of climate within the Greek population from “xenophile” to “xenophobe” attitudes among some population groups. “The Golden Dawn” movement and other populists are active in Thessalonica and they are also involved in the municipal administration.

### **New immigration wave and Brain-Drain**

There is a new emigration wave in the direction of EU and Australia. The unemployment of youth people is nowhere as high in Europe as in Greece. It would be speculated, that about 100 000 academics emigrated from Greece since 2011. According to the information by Böll Stiftung, new immigrants are often young, they are high qualified and they are speaking several languages. The unemployment among the young people in Greece is at 45% by total unemployment rate of 20%.

Currently many young and qualified people are leaving the country, which means that Greece actually registers a huge brain-drain. At the same time Greece loses important and qualified persons. The researcher at the field of migration Klaus J. Bade, chairperson of the expert council of German foundations for Integration and Migration in Berlin describes Migration of young European citizens from Spain and Greece as “Conjuncture and crisis migration”. According to Bade, the key Push-Factor is the poor economic situation amongst others in Greece.





## 23.04.2018. - 1<sup>st</sup>. Seminar day

**Hildegard Azimi-Boedecker, IBB e. V.**

### **Introduction: Thessalonica from the perspective of migration politics**

Mrs. Azimi-Boedecker from the IBB e.V. held welcoming speech and gave a brief input on the project “Europe4Refugees”. Furthermore Mrs. Azimi-Boedecker took a turn on the Erasmus + and explained the function of the transnational networking. According to her, it was important to emphasize, that not all NGO’s involved in this project worked directly with refugees, but the similarities in their work brought them together. (The key word for this section is Empowerment). The countries of origin of the project partners are the European countries which are important for the transition of the refugees on their way to the target countries on the European continent (in this case, these are Norway and Germany). The main idea behind the project title “Europe4Refugees” has developed from the idea that the people/refugees are coming from all geographical directions (South, East and West) and are trying to head North. That was the principally the background of the idea to meet each other in order to get to know the experiences from all countries and try to learn from each other. The first learning activity in this project took place in Cosenza, the second learning activity takes place in Thessalonica and the third most probably in Oslo (Norway).



After clearing the guiding idea behind the project Mrs. Azimi-Boedecker and Mr. Psychoudakis explained some organizational issues about the day-to-day routine during the learning activities and the preparation of the protocol of the learning activity. It is to be prepared directly at the meeting for each meeting directly in English and upon its finish to be distributed to all the participants and the visiting contributors, as well as the local stakeholders in Thessalonica, Greece.

### **Latest news from the partner countries**

#### **Greece: Vasilios Psychoudakis, NGO Dialogos Thessalonica**

According to Mr. and Mrs. Psychoudakis the daily mail is full of articles about the refugees. In that sense the refugees would have to leave Greece, but the Greek Government would try to organize the language courses from September onwards, in order to integrate people. This is respectively the main issue with which the NGO’s in Greece are dealing with. The situation is dramatic at the island of Lesbos. Moria refugee camp. This is the main refugee camp for single men and women, whereas the Mytilene camp is exclusively for the vulnerable people. At the moment Camp Moria has three and a half times more people than it was built for. The capacity of the camp is about 2000 people, but there are already 7000 refugees accommodated currently in the camp.



There are also some speculations that the High Court of Greece prohibited the refugees to leave the islands. If this claim supposed to be true, it would be against the European Human Right convention. Although according to the press (see: attachment) the newly arrivals are allowed to move from Greek islands towards the mainland, but this decision does not apply to all the refugees who have been trapped on islands for months. Also there is a notion that the interviews with the asylum seekers in the process of asylum seeking should be accelerated. This would have a great disadvantage, as there would be no time for counseling with legal advisors in order to accelerate process. However the process would most probably end up then with the rejection. Also it is important to emphasize that the numbers of new arrivals are varying from month to month. The statistics are very different. Moria on island Lesbos is a village with 2000 inhabitants, with the necessary infrastructure (electricity, water, etc.). But now, there are 7000 people additionally (refugees and asylum seekers) which brings the local infrastructure to the limits. In that sense this fact represents the ground for the rise of tensions among the asylum seekers and the local inhabitants.

**Hungary: Barbara Marosvary, NGO Menedek, Budapest**



Currently there are three most important issues in Hungary. At first the government has been reelected two weeks prior to the learning activity in Thessalonica. Fidesz Party has won 2/3 of parliament majority. The core of their election campaign was the antagonistic politics and anti-refugee campaign. The impacts of this sort of campaigning are the cuts in the refugee help. This is also visible through the border fence towards other countries. The number of the new arrivals has been limited to 5 persons per day prior to the elections. After the election this number has been decreased to 2 persons per day. The consequence of this politics is also visible in the neighbor country Serbia, where many people are waiting to try their luck and move further towards the target countries. According to Mrs. Marosvary, the NGO's were also abused during the electoral campaign and stamped as the enemies of Hungarian states. This is especially applicable in the case of SOROS Foundation. Furthermore, there were threats outspoken, according to which the so called "Soros-law" could be introduced. Hereby would all individuals and NGO's involved a refugee support network be fined up to 25% of their annual income, plus the possible access prohibition to the vicinity of Hungarian border, in order to withhold them from providing the assistance to the refugees. It is furthermore the position of government, by which the NGO's and SOROS should be stopped in undermining the work of Hungarian Government. The above mentioned law has not yet been adopted, solely because the parliament would hold its first session on May the 3<sup>rd</sup> 2018. In case of NGO Menedek this law does not influence their work to the large extent, since the legal advisers and lawyers employed by the NGO do not help the migration but only help the migrants who are already situated in Hungary. The goal of this politics is to try to scare the activists and NGO in helping refugees and migrants. At the moment it is hard to predict of what would or should happen if the above mentioned law proposal should be adopted.



### **Francesco Cirino, La Kasbah, Italy**

It is already 2 months since the elections in Italy, but according to Mr. Cirino there is still no unity among the politicians and they are nowhere near to building up a new government. Furthermore the president of the senate tried to unify the parties in order to create the functioning political situation, but it was one unsuccessful attempt. According to Mr. Cirino the 5-Star-Movement, which has been founded about five years ago does everything in their power to undermine the elections. The newly elected parties are trying to avoid the associations the “old political parties”. Although they won ca. 40% of total vote they see themselves as a winner. Mr. Cirino explained situation as following: according to him, it does not matter who wins. The matter in the asylum seeking process would not change. There are some disadvantages in the developments in Italy which are influencing the refugees and asylum seekers, such as: the acceleration of the asylum-seeking process (sinking the rate of about 2-3 years of process time, to about 4-5, including the appeal time), the denial of the second appeal on the court decision in the asylum-seeking process for the refugees and asylum seekers. In case of the second appeal denial for refugees and asylum seekers of there is a loophole in the law, as the refugees and asylum seekers have their right to put an appeal denied, but the Italian citizens are allowed to. This enables the NGO activists like La Kasbah members to make an appeal on the higher instance court for the refugees and asylum seekers. To summarize, no one is tolerant towards refugees and this unwritten law has proven right at the electoral campaign in Italy – who talks about the rights of refugees and asylum-seekers is deemed to lose the elections.



### **Germany – Mrs. Hildegard Azimi-Boedecker, IBB e.V. Project – Coordinator**

Mrs Azimi-Boedecker spoke about several levels of news in Germany. These are presented accordingly below:

First: There are some changes in Germany. The new government has been established and the new minister of internal affairs is Mr. Horst Seehofer of CSU (Christian Social Union). In order to stop the migration to Germany his plan also contains “anchor-centers”, where the arrival, processing and resending/returning the refugees to their native countries would be organized and reconciled at the single place. Throughout the construction of such centers the supporters, legal advisers, volunteers etc. would have no access to the refugees in need. It is still unknown what sort of consequences would these actions have on the situation at the field.

Second: According to the announcements regarding the family reunification, all the beneficiaries of social benefits in Germany (HARTZ IV) would have the right for family reunification in Germany denied. Which consequences this speculation may have occurs already in the report by the TV Program “Panorama”; There are refugees who are returning from Germany to Turkey, although they have their asylum in Germany approved and



residence status legally resolved. Their goal was to get together with their families in Germany. But instead they incline towards the family reunification in Turkey, taking all the dangers of this move back across the river Evros (natural border between Greece and Turkey) in consideration. But this desperate move enables them to be with their families. Moreover the number of new arrivals to Germany is very low. According to our external expert Mrs. Michauk there were about 300 to 400 new arrivals to Berlin since the beginning of the year. Mrs. Azimi-Boedecker commented that it is quite depressing to see what happens on the level of EU; there are many announcements about unification of the regulations regarding the asylum-seeking process. Moreover there would be some corrections regarding the regulations on safe-third countries to disadvantage of asylum-seekers and refugees. These novelties in the EU-Migrations Agenda should be adopted before the next European Parliament elections next year.

Nevertheless there are also some positive developments. The number of third-country students or refugees who enrolled in the universities is growing. Some Universities are employing teachers from Syria or other big-five refugee countries, who could work in schools. This is perhaps only positive development for Germany at the moment, which unfortunately does not apply for everyone but only for the high educated people.

#### **Norway; Atle Sunde, EUROMASC**



Norway also had elections in 2017 but these brought no changes in the conservative right government. For example, new Minister of Internal Affairs has been charged for dehumanizing people and beating up a refugee in 1997. The deportations to Afghanistan continued also from Norway. Many refugees are living on the streets and they neither a feeling of being accepted nor integrated. Deportation would

be paid (ca. 100€) and the people would usually be departed to the towns other than their town of origin. Furthermore Mr. Sunde reported that only 5 unaccompanied minors were accepted this year. In conclusion of his report Mr. Sunde emphasized the bitter reality in Norway, which is: if the refugees and asylum-seekers are registered in any other country, they would be sent back.

#### **Dimitris Varadinis, legal adviser for NGO Praksis**

##### **Promoting access to health- care for refugees and asylum-seekers in Thessalonica**

Mr. Varadinis gave an input and reported shortly about the history and field of expertise of NGO Praksis. NGO Praksis is an independent NGO which made the first steps in 1997 working together with the SMF Greece. Since 2004 NGO Praksis is an independent NGO based in Thessalonica, with the mobile units in Lesbos, Kos and other hotspots, providing the medical care to the asylum seekers and refugees. Accordingly the NGO Praksis (Programs of development, social support and medical cooperation) is an independent non-



governmental organization, whose main goal is based around implementation of humanitarian programs and medical interventions nationwide.

The main goal in the activities of NGO Praksis could be identified as elimination of social and economic exclusion of vulnerable groups. Therefore the beneficiaries of NGO Praksis are all socially excluded groups of population, such as: Greek citizens without health insurance, refugees, applicants for international protection, migrants, victims of human trafficking, Roma population, HIV and Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C patients. Their field of work is based around the Polyclinics in Athens and Thessalonica, which are operational since 1997, Day Centers for Homeless People in Athens, Piraeus and Thessalonica, Mobile medical units at the entry points (Lesvos, Samos, Kos), as well as outreach activities at Chios and Leros. Furthermore in their field of work NGO Praksis has 12 Accommodation centers for unaccompanied Minors in Athens, Thessalonica and Patras, Drop-In-Center for Unaccompanied Minors in Patras (Children on the Move), Accommodation, psychosocial support and escort services to those eligible for relocation and family reunification (1000 apartments) in collaboration with UNHCR (funded by ECHO), as well as Transit accommodation centers for minors and emergency accommodation for vulnerable groups (Athens, Lesvos and Samos). NGO Praksis participates in European and national networks and campaigns – EU Civil Society Platform against Human Trafficking, FEANTSA (European Federation of National Organizations Working with the Homeless), Network for Recording Incidents of Racist Violence and many more.

In their field of work NGO Praksis is trying to follow the holistic approach to support, to empower, integrate and reintegrate all those who are not included in society. Current interventions for refugees in Thessalonica by NGO Praksis include the provision of medical care and support at their Polyclinic, raising the public awareness over health issues, (national campaigns on HIV, Hepatitis B and C, vaccination of vulnerable groups), psychosocial support and legal counseling for all POCs whoa are residing in the accommodation units provided by NGO Praksis. As Mr. Varadinis reported, NGO Praksis collaborates with the municipal authorities of Thessalonica, NGO's and state actors in order to safeguard the protection of the fundamental rights of refugees and asylum seekers i.e. access to RAO, public hospitals, education, legal counseling and escort services among others.

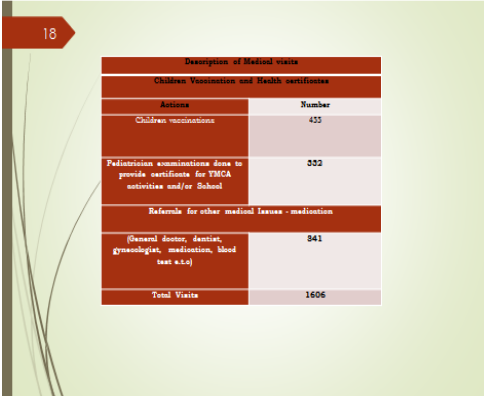
Furthermore Mr. Varadinis explained the legislative framework for the protection of the right to health. This is based on the on the Article 5. §3 of Greek Constitution ("Every person has the right of protection of his/her health and his/her genetic identity") and Article 21 §3 ("The state takes care for the protection of its citizens") as well as Article 2 ("The respect and the protection of a person's value constitute primary concern for the state") respectively. In accordance to the provided articles and paragraphs the third-country nationals, regardless of their legal status, should have access to health care. Mr. Varanidis explained some further legal regulations such as presidential decree 220/2007, which represents the transposition of





EU Directive 2003/9/EU into the Greek national law, which regulates the health-care support for all asylum seekers. According to this directive, the asylum seekers are entitled receive necessary health, pharmaceutical and hospital care free of charge even in conditions if they do not possess the necessary health insurance and financial means. Furthermore the support includes the clinical and medical examinations in public hospitals, health centers or regional medical centers, medication provided on prescription by a medical doctors serving in one of the institution mentioned above, as well as the hospital assistance in public hospitals. In case of emergency the aid should be provided free of charge. Mr. Varanidis also named the Presidential Decree 141/2007 as a core guidance of the activities of NGO Praksis in the issues of health care, which transposes the same standards of access to the health care system for the Greek citizens as for the third-country nationals, stateless persons, refugees or for those persons eligible for international protection.

According to the new law transposition from EU law 4375/2016 on granting and revoking the status of international protection, this also includes the medical examination and psychosocial diagnosis where necessary. However Mr. Varanidis reported that it was hard to pass these regulations fully in practice in Greece due to the impacts and issues triggered by the economic crisis in Greece. Especially vulnerable and affected groups by this decision were all people without medical insurance, which also includes the refugees, asylum-seekers, applicants, the families of asylum-seekers etc. Further difficulties include the availability of the high cost medication, lack of interpreters/intercultural mediators in public hospitals, who could inform the persons of concern about their rights, long waiting periods of time for the persons of concern, as well as administrative barriers in issuing AMKA (Social Security Number). However Mr. Varadinis hopes this issue could be resolved in a little while. Hereupon he gave a few examples on the good practices in promoting access to the health care. These include following: accommodation and assistance to asylum seekers and relocation candidates (funded by UNHCR), the coverage or the needs of children for vaccinations and provided medical monitoring to adults and minors through NGO Praksis, as well as involvement into the emergency vaccination campaigns with other NGO's etc.



| Description of Medical visits   |             |
|---|-------------|
| Children Vaccination and Health certificates  |             |
| Actions   | Number      |
| Children vaccinations   | 435         |
| Pediatrician examinations done to provide certificate for YMCA activities and/or School | 332         |
| Referrals for other medical issues - medication   |             |
| (General doctor, dentist, gynecologist, medication, blood test s.t.o)                   | 841         |
| <b>Total Visits</b>   | <b>1606</b> |

Description of medical visits



Through their work NGO Praksis managed to raise the awareness in regard to the health issues of refugees. Among others there were meetings held with Health Management Team for all accommodated persons of concern, based on their individual needs. This enabled the presence of the medical staff employed by NGO Praksis in working groups in order to discuss the needs of persons of concern for psychiatric health and psychosocial support. This issue also contributed to the field of expertise of NGO Praksis and set them as one of key actors in organizing subgroups. These subgroups have professional aims in informing staff at the public hospitals, municipal authorities and other NGO' about the needs of refugees. In the term of prevention, the role of NGO Praksis was huge in providing personalized information to the persons of concern regarding the prevention of transmitted diseases. Furthermore, there were also the follow-up meetings held with the individuals, after receiving the medical treatment at the PRAKSIS Polyclinic and many more.

At the end Mr. Varanidis concluded his presentation with the questions and answers. These were mainly focused on the number of employees at the NGO Praksis as well as the finance model. In that sense the project partners and external experts also information about the employees at the NGO Praksis, which is about 1000 persons nationwide. Furthermore Mr. Varanidis explained the finance model, according to which NGO Praksis is financed to 20% by the state and to 80% by the different sources.

### **Paul Esser, social worker at NGO NAOMI, Thessalonica**



The staff members of Naomi are predominantly from Germany, but Mr. Psychoudakis (Dialogos) is a Greek member of NGO NAOMI. Mr. Paul Esser is a staff member and a social worker at NAOMI. He welcomed the project partners and external participants at NAOMI and gives a short overview of NGO NAOMI, which has been founded by the several members of German community several years ago. At this time the topic of migration has not yet been at the center of discussion as it is the case in last few years in Greece. NGO NAOMI has been involved in the Thessalonica but also in and around the refugee camp in Idomeni. The members of NGO NAOMI at the Idomeni refugee camp got involved into the local activities there, such as food distribution, donation distribution. This happened approximately at the same time of foundation of the sawing workshop at the offices of NAOMI in Thessalonica. That is where the NGO NAOMI stands at the moment for as their core work focuses on the sawing workshop. NAOMI also offers the German classes for the immigrants/refugees on their way to Germany, people on the way to family reunion/reunification. Paul is a social worker who works at NAOMI and his role in the NGO interacts with all other departments, as NAOMI deals with some situations, for which the intervention of a social worker is necessary.

The sawing workshop is also divided into the training/schooling part, which offers the sawing classes, either for beginners without previous experience in sawing or the courses for





advanced participants, e.g. former employees in textile industry in their countries of origin. At the moment the employees at the NGO NAOMI are trying to see if it is possible to have their work experience recognized. NAOMI is not allowed to sell their products due to the rules and regulations of the Greek bureaucracy, but they are in the process to register their products, in order to be able to sell them. At the moment the products would be exchanged for a donation. Concerning the German language classes, Mr. Esser emphasizes the difficulties of an access to the process the family reunification and how time consuming this process is. As an example, he mentions some people began taking the German language lessons at the time as Idomeni was in the center of media and who are still taking them. There are about fifty people come weekly regularly to the sewing lessons but there is steady increase of interest. Regarding the German lessons the number of participants has varied more in the past few months. There used to be up to seventy students per week, but at the moment there are about twenty. At the moment two people are hired as employees at the sewing course but what are the future perspectives not Paul's field of responsibility. It depends pretty much on available budget. Once the issues about legal selling of our products are solved and once the market for the products made at the sewing course should be established, there would be perspective to hire more people. From the present perspective about the long term plans it is hard to say something, because NAOMI also depends on funding. Mr. Esser works in social department, which is responsible for coordination with other NGO's from Greece and correspondence with the NGO's from Germany: This correspondence is mainly based on providing the information, which could be helpful for the family members of the people who are yet residents in Germany. Nevertheless the largest part of the social department takes care of the people who arrived to Greece before 2015. They are not taking part in the family reunification and they are also not equally treated by the legislation and they have no access to the resources. Mr. Esser is not sure how familiar we are with the support structure and welfare system for refugees, migrants and asylum seekers in Greece. In that sense, the January 1<sup>st</sup> 2015 marks the shift in the practice with the above mentioned groups. The people who arrived to Greece after the January 1<sup>st</sup> 2015 can have the access to the urban housing provided by the UN and they also can have an access to the CASH program by the UN and Greek government, who are offering financial support in amount 100 € to the individuals and up to 500€ for the family members. To summarize, the preconditions to take part in the support programs is the arrival to Greece after the January 1<sup>st</sup> 2015. Another issue is that of UNHCR housing support. This would be closed for the legally recognized refugees, which means that the people would have to leave the housing under the UN supervision until June 2018. At the moment there are no plans to solve the problem of accommodation for those, who will have to leave the houses (e.g. the refugees with unsolved legal status).



The people who came to Greece before 2015 are facing this problem ongoing and they are often living in a precarious situation, in most cases marginalized from the society. They usually have troubles paying rent, bills, etc. As a social department at NAOMI they are trying to see the possibility of providing the means of support, including the financial means.



Hereto they are trying to find the access to the public support system which is decisive for the broader society in general. Due to the high frequency of problems, there are about 100 people daily passing through the social department at NAOMI.

The future perspectives at the NGO NAOMI are based around the attempts to involve more progressive participants from the sewing course into the job market and to try to integrate them into the daily employment. Big obstacle in this case is the language. The requirements are related towards the basic knowledge in Greek in order to communicate at the work place. This is also very important to mention, because there are not enough language courses offered to refugees. As a comparison Mr. Esser took example of Germany and the offers made by the Agency for migration and refugees (BAMF). It is a lot harder to learn the language in Greece.

Among all activities by the NGO NAOMI, there is also the Godfather/Godmother Project. Our host Mr. Psychoudakis was also actively involved in this project, but this project has been initiated long before Mr. Esser came to NAOMI. The sense of this project was to involve the people who are not involved into the daily work at NAOMI but who had a wish to support refugees and immigrants. The sense of this project was to build a closer relationship between the families from Greece with the refugee/immigrant families. This would happen outside the institutional frame and this approach made possible for more things to happen outside the institutional frame. The idea of Godmothers and Godfathers was an early idea of protestant church in order to help the families, especially focusing on mothers with children with absent fathers or single-parent families. These families were usually from African countries. The sewing lessons were founded as the initiative of the Godfather/Godmother project and the main idea at the beginning was to have the sewing lessons only for the members. At the moment there are two families who are part of the Godmother/Godfather initiative. The background of this idea was the help and support in order to integrate better in the existing society in Greece, especially in the society in Thessalonica. This should give them the kick-start in the search for work, help them by the access to the social life etc. Vasilis gave an example of the family he was in contact with through this project; they served as godparents for the family from Iran who moved to a smaller town of Katerini five years ago. Vasilis's family also advised them and thought it would be good for them, since it was a smaller city, where they would find work easier. They also received a good means of support and managed to settle in the town of Katerini, in a small house with the garden. The family father has found a job and the whole family is attending the language courses. Off course the problems always exist for the people from other countries. There are certain limits and as an individual it is possible to develop a different kind of relationship through the godfather/godmother program as with the workers in the NGO. On the other hand there is a bit more flexibility in the approach and communication with each other. Most of the people who are currently supported by NGO NAOMI arrived from Afrin in Syria but among those who arrived before 2015 was a large variety of ethnicities. Apart from Syrians there were for example people from Iraq, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Benin etc. Due to the asylum procedure the people from African countries had much less chances as those from Syria. The Syrians have



acceptance rate of 99% in Greece, whereas the people who came to Greece before the January 2015 must extend their residence permit every year.

#### **14:00 Visit to the Refugee day center Alkyone, Thessalonica**



“Alkyone” is the project by the ecological movement of Thessalonica, which is funded by the German NGO “Diakonische Katastrophenhilfe”. This funding has been born out of the work done by Alkyone at Idomeni. Diakonie offered help as they wanted to distribute clothes to the refugees at the refugee camp. Diakonie was directed to Alkyone. This action has functioned very well. Alkyone was given a vehicle/a van, a staff-member and money for the

clothes: Beside the clothes distribution Alkyone started the kitchen together with NGO Naomi and the Chefs Club of Thessalonica. The meals were cooked at the spot and more than 3500 meals were provided per day. After these successful actions “Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe” were interested in further cooperation with Alkyone and asked for the future plans. Alkyone had plans for the social center for refugees, which would be based on the volunteer-basis. The Diakonie liked the plan and their cooperation with Alkyone. Although “Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe” usually works in the areas hit by a catastrophes, they asked for the annual budget proposal for this center. As result of the cooperation the Diakonie will continue to fund the Alkyone day center for one more year at least. According to our respondent Diakonie considers the Alkyone Day Center to be one of their best projects.

“Alkyone Day Center” opened in November 2016 and they brought different departments under one roof. Alkyone rents the building where they are situated. Because of their activities the NRC approached Alkyone and offered the joint rent for the building. They are sharing the different floors in the same building but the both organizations are looking at each other, as they naturally belong to each other. The participants at the learning activity are received at the reception and social department, where people get registered or get informed about their fields of preferences. Due to the character of the building (there are also apartments situated there) it would have been possible to expect the complaints by the neighbors. There are no complaints at the moment and the neighbors at the building were also friendly with the idea. There is also a music studio and the flamenco dance studio at the first floor. The word-of-mouth propaganda is the only way the Alkyone present themselves in the public. “If you are a refugee, you have heard of us”, were the words of our host. The leaflets were distributed only in the first week after their foundation. There were no more public actions, leaflets or announcements since then.

People in need can also get in contact with the social workers and get in contact with the education and other social activities, offered by NGO “Alkyone”. E.G. there are activities offered on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. The music workshop takes place on Tuesdays, Wednesday there is the workshop “Games of the world” and on Thursday there is



a city tour. From there the participants were taken to a tour around the offices. Every Friday is a day for the workshops for the special group and on Wednesday and Thursday there is possibility to hold an legal assistance at these rooms. The social workers, psychologists and others meet people and try to fulfill their needs. The different departments at the “NGO Alkyone” are all situated in one building and the available rooms are relative small. The participants at the learning activity were divided into three groups in order for each and one to get the possibility to visit each department.

Next stop was the clothing department. The clothing department provides the second hand-clothes to the needy. The people can come and search for what they need. Besides this service, the clothing department has a few wash machines and tumble - dryers for people to be able to wash and dry their clothes at the spot. The clothing is donated and collected at the Akropolis warehouse. It is then distributed from there to Alkyone. The clothes are sorted by sizes and the wardrobes are refilled six to ten times a day. The reason for the frequent refilling lays in the increased visits during the past few days to the clothing department. There is also a small workshop within the clothing department, which employs two volunteers, who are sawing the garments from the clothes which cannot be used for the distribution. The cooperation with volunteers is also made at the spot, in order for them to be able to earn some money for the living.



The participants at the learning activity also visited the kitchen, where there the homeless refugees would be provided with the breakfast and lunch. There are 100 meals per day distributed in the kitchen but the number has also considerably increased to the 150 meals per day. There are also many visitors at the breakfast but both meals were finished a lot earlier as usually. There are many visitors at the time. We are also able to take a look at the kitchen with kitchen staff, who are preparing everything for the next day. The target group at the beginning was not clearly defined but as the number of people in need increased, the employees the NGO Alkyone had to clearly define a target group in order to be able to help those with the largest need.





At the end, the representative of Alkyone enabled the participants to have a short insight in their activities. Alkyone Day Center does not provide any accommodation but the situation is very difficult for the homeless people. There are many homeless people in the city at the moment. Alkyone registered over 1000 homeless refugees over the last six months. Nevertheless Alkyone provided only the number of active homeless people. That means, these are people who arrived as homeless and who use the services provided by Alkyone. Four months ago the number was about 400 homeless refugees. Now the number are much higher as those which they had four months ago. In their gender analysis it could be concluded, that the homeless refugees were for a long period of time only the single men. There are also many families who come and they stay homeless also for a period of time but the homeless families have accommodation possibilities as of the very day the participants at the learning activity in Thessalonica visited the Alkyone Day Center (23.04.2018). Before this date there was no official place to go. Even though if these families came and stated they were homeless, there was no solution for them. There were some unofficial solutions at the table, which involved voluntary shelter at the refugee camp or leaving the municipality and being invisible. The biggest issue for Alkyone is safety. Therefore they are happy about this solution, that all homeless refugees are welcomed to go and stay at the “Ladadika” camp. That is what they have been asking for, for a long time. Besides the importance of providing a shelter for the people Akropolis has been also asked to establish the kitchen at the “Ladadika” camp and provide the food for the people. Our collocutor has not had an opportunity to check how far they are with this project.



**16:00 Dimitrios Papaioannou. Day center for homeless people NGO Praksis, Thessalonica**



The visitors of the day center for homeless people managed by NGO Praksis Thessalonica have a large scope of possibilities offered. They can take bath, wash their clothes in the washing machines, which are available at the site for visitors to use. The visitors can also visit the social workers who are employed at the center, or visit the psychiatrist or other doctors who are working at the center. There is also a legal advisor working at the center for the visitors in need of a legal advice. The persons who come to the center for the first time have an opportunity to speak to the social worker in order to get the insight in the troubles and problems the person has. These basic needs often include for example the food, place to stay, place to sleep and afterwards the day center works with the person together, in order to meet the needs. There is also a different approach in methods. For example the background check takes less than one month. A lot of work has been done



in a form of a street work and the employees at the center continue to do it. They go on the field and work on the streets once or twice a month in order to see, if there are some new faces. There are also people who usually do not come to the day center. Furthermore, the employees create the relationship in the streets either with visitors or with prospective visitors. In this way we already get informed about their needs. In such manner we get to know the living conditions of these people and also get the chance to inform them about the new programs and means of support.

The center is opened from 10:00. - 20:00 hours but the center is closed 2 hours during the day in order to tidy and clean the rooms at the center. There are about 20 persons working at the center. Among them are also nurses. During the visit to the day center the participants at the learning activity were able to see the different facilities and different offices (e.g. offices of social workers, utility room, wash room, waiting room, medical practice and doctor's office). Since the offices are relatively small for all of participants to visit them at once, they were invited to sit together in the waiting room and have talk there. At the time of the visit there were 3 social workers and one nurse in the office. Apart from them, there was also a part of a fundraising management in the office.

The visitors of the center for homeless people are predominantly male. A few years ago the part of homeless women was about 10% of total number but in a meantime it has increased to about 30% of female visitors. The increase in numbers of female visitors happened mainly due to the economic crisis which affected all spheres of society in Greece. There are about 130 visitors per day. The majority of visitors are from Greece, Pakistan and Bulgaria. Earlier the visitors were predominantly from Syria and Afghanistan, but now the most of them are coming from Pakistan. There also a smaller trend for people coming from Iran, Iraq and Turkey but in a few smaller numbers. The most of the refugees from Syria are housed in the shelters or in apartments. The danger of such a vast number of different nationalities increases the conflict potential. The employees at the center are doing their best to try to diminish the conflict potential. The day center for the homeless people has been opened since 2014 and in a different intensity there were many people who passed through the center since then. Many of them also managed to find an accommodation or even an employment.

Due to the diversity in nationalities the day center for homeless people has sometimes a need for the interpreters. There are interpreters for Pakistan languages but the assistance would also be asked other shelters, which are operated by NGO Praksis. The same things happened in past few years. For example the people from Syria speak some English but the people from Afghanistan and Pakistan do not speak English. In that sense we try to organize a language assistance to make the communication between the employees and non-English speaking visitors of the center easier.



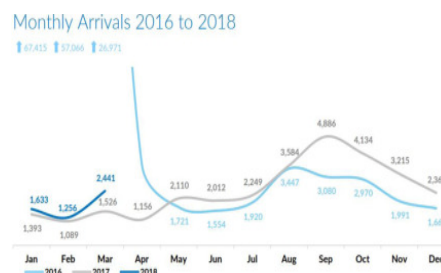
## 24.04.2018, 2<sup>nd</sup>. Seminar day

**Stefanija Stefanovic**  
**UNHCR Office Thessalonica, Operational Overview**



UNHCR in Greece focuses on the issues of accommodation. In this case the main concern is the issues and problems with the accommodation of refugees and asylum seekers in Thessalonica. UNHCR in Greece focuses on the task to support the Greek NGO's but it is the NGO's alone who are planning and working together with the refugees and asylum seekers. Due to the better weather conditions the number of

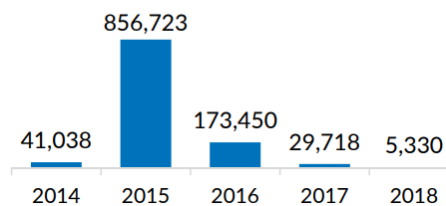
new arrivals is growing. According to the statistic this number is growing from month to month.



**Greece: The evolution of arrivals**

According to Mrs. Stefanovic there were about 1 Million people passing through Greece from 2014 to 2018.

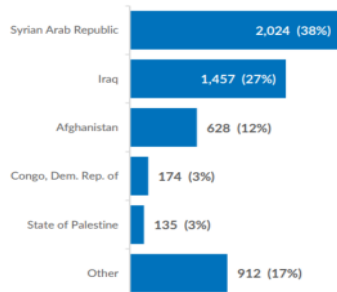
### Arrivals from 2014 to 2018



**The evolution of arrivals 2014-2018**

At the moment it is possible to observe the shift of the new arrivals in accordance to their country of origin.





**Division by the country of origin**

According to Mrs. Stefanovic the people who entered Greece until March 2016 could apply for reallocation. The target country of reallocation does not depend on them and the reallocation applicants can not choose their target land. Mrs. Stefanovic gave an insight in the background of the relocation scheme. According to this scheme the EU member states made a legal commitment to relocate and divide 160 000 people from Italy, Greece and Turkey who have clear need of international protection. The commitment for the number of allocated persons would depend on the size of population, total GDP, average number of spontaneous asylum applications and unemployment rate. Through this division markers and relocation scheme the commitment of 64 000 of people from Greece to other EU member states came to existence. Furthermore Greek government was to establish 50 000 reception places, out of which UNHCR should have contributed 20 000 in the dignified shelters. Although this whole scheme has been adopted at the EU level, aside from Germany and France none of the countries fulfilled their obligation.

The important shift in the work since 2016 is marked with the possibility for the asylum seekers to apply for the asylum in Greece. This is also very significant considering the fact that very few persons at all applied for an asylum in Greece. In 2017 the operation by UNHCR included the 22 000 accommodation units in sustainable mechanisms, which predominantly include apartments to accommodate the refugees, among which again some apartments are reserved for the unaccompanied minors. This number of places has already been set before the larger number of refugees and asylum seekers came to Greece. The persons who suited this accommodation were the asylum seekers which fulfilled the criteria as very vulnerable people.

The closer cooperation with the Greek communities and Greek state included also gradual handing over of facilities to Greek government (700 centers for unaccompanied and separated children centers, but at the moment there are no shelters for unaccompanied minors managed by the UNHCR. There are local stakeholders/partner organizations which are founded in order to manage this kind of accommodation. As Mrs. Stefanovic said, it is not only important for the UNHCR to manage the accommodation and settle the vulnerable groups of people at the apartments. It is also important to find the accessible and available



accommodation, to rent the accommodation, keep it functional, to act as the middleman for the appointments etc. It is also important to be in touch with the psychologist for example for the people in need, as well as to provide the legal aid, which is principally based on cooperation with different NGO's, in this case the NGO's which offer the legal advisor for these purposes.

Speaking of closer cooperation with the Greek communities, UNHCR sees as one of the main goals for the future the inclusion of the municipalities in work as much as possible. In this sense UNHCR sees municipality of Thessalonica as very important partner in dealing with the issues with asylum seekers. The problems in this vulnerable group are diverse, from everyday problems to domestic violence or gender and race issues. This is followed by the continuous improvement of infrastructure at sites. UNHCR covers fully the rent and utility costs of the fully-equipped accommodation and the protégés receive monthly cash assistance in order to cover their daily needs. In order to deal with the burden of everyday life and also with the complex problems there is also a social support and referrals to the specialized services. Here through there is also assistance in guidance for the residents in order to access the other support and services (e.g. psychosocial support, education/school enrolment for children, childcare support, language classes, etc. This sort of assistance ends 6 months after the immigrants receive refugee status. UNHCR carries out an important work also on the islands, in order to provide counseling, to improve the conditions of living and to provide as much assistance as possible in any form.

The main challenge in the field of accommodation according to Mrs. Stefanovic rests upon the slow relocation pledges and departures. Furthermore, there are big difficulties in identifying and establishing accommodation places. Additionally there is also the lack of information on asylum process and the decision made on one hand and on the other, there is a high expectation by the beneficiaries. There are some present phenomena in the communities which spans from prioritization of relocation candidates over vulnerable candidates to rejection of refugee presence by some local communities. According to hitherto existent experience it takes many months to process the relocation applications for asylum seekers to reach the countries where they want to apply for asylum. The UNHCR sees its duty in correcting the fake information spread either among the asylum seekers and refugees or within the Greek society and provide the correct information about the conditions in Greece and EU regarding the rights of asylum seekers and refugees. Therefore UNHCR pursues and cooperates intensively with the local communities in order to raise awareness and to enable the contact and intercultural exchange.

According to Mrs. Stefanovic, if the asylum seekers are not able to relocate to some other European country they attempt to stay and live in Thessalonica, since Thessalonica is a big city which offers more possibilities as some rural areas. For most of them, even if it is not the best solution it is the best solution available at the moment, since the people are usually not willing to go to the other smaller places to live. There are also many problems. Due to the Greek crisis it is extensively hard for the Greek population to find the employment but there



are also presently available efforts to integrate the asylum seekers in the employment agency quotes. Most of the refugees and asylum seekers apply currently for an asylum in Greece, in order to be able travel to other EU countries and stay there for the period of three months. The target countries in this case are Germany and other north European countries.

The future plans of the UNHCR include handing over all activities to the Greek authorities. By handing over, it is meant to give away the strategy of the UNHCR further to the municipalities, which would enable the municipalities to continue with the same system and the way of dealing with the problems of the persons of concern. Before the program should be handed over to the Greek authorities Mrs. Stefanovic emphasized the importance of expanding the program and cooperation in the municipalities. As Mrs. Stefanovic reports the focus of work by UNHCR will be shifted towards advocacy, capacity development for the Greek organizations and protection monitoring. The latter involves the basic human rights which should be implemented and respected.



At the end of her briefing Mrs. Stefanovic left some time for the questions. The conference participants were interested in issues of categorization of unaccompanied minors, the further management of funds after the June 2018, to name a few. Mrs. Stefanovic gave an thorough answer to the questions. The answers are summarized and wrapped together. The UNHCR understand the unaccompanied minors as the underage people

without parents or an adult custodian. There are 700 cases which were managed by UNHCR but these cases were handed over to the local authorities. Concerning the accommodation issues, according to the UNHCR rules the persons are allowed to stay up to six month in the accommodation managed by UNHCR after their status is recognized. Hereafter they should leave the accommodation. At the moment there are no free places at the accommodations managed by the UNHCR since there are no more funds for the accommodation itself. The possible solutions would be looked after. In the matter of handing the responsibilities over to the local authorities 2 UNHCR employees are working together with the municipality of Thessalonica and the municipality is always a partner to the UNHCR, who tries to support and empower the municipal partners.

In the matter on the European law on accommodation system it is known that the asylum seekers would receive assistance in Greece only if they have their own registered place of living. Therefore the homeless people have a big problem. In the case of rejection of the asylum application, the asylum seekers can appeal on the second instance. But the big problem with this issue currently is that there are very few organizations which are providing legal aid. On the other hand there are very few people returning back to their countries of origin, i.e. they would not be returned to Syria or Iraq, although in Iraq they would be sent back, but only to a very few places.



**Dimitris Koros**

### **Greek Council of Refugees (GCR)**



Greek Council of Refugees (GCR) is a NGO which provides legal and social assistance to the refugees. The organization has an open-door policy, which in this sense means that their offices are opened at 4 days a week. Their work targets all refugees who are searching for legal or social aid with the diverse problems such as medical problems, accommodation problems, problems with the employment, social support and all other types of social work. GCR arranged

mobile units in Kavala and Volve for this purpose. These mobile units are opened twice a week and they provide same services as the office in Thessalonica.

The core of work of GCR is directed towards collaboration with the legal advisers and social workers in order to provide the right help for the beneficiaries in the field or in detention. Mr. Koros devoted some time in order to explain the term “detention”, which is in this case related to the administrative detention. According to him this is not a popular issue, despite its existence at the forefront of the state policies for addressing irregular migration and having been subjected to the thorough critique from national and international organization and bodies. Although administrative detention is merely a means to an end, imposed according to law under strict conditions, after an individualized assessment, and after the rejection, on legal grounds of the imposition of an alternative measure, it mostly works as a tool of policy making for migration and asylum. Furthermore the detention can not be imposed in accordance to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) policy. In that sense there already were more than 20 decisions by ECHR against Greece regarding the violation of human rights in Greece alone, which have been found on the ground of violation of article 3 of the European Convention of Human Rights that forbids torture and inhuman or degrading punishment or treatment.

After this short excursion Mr. Koros emphasized that the core work of GCR has an aim to help the vulnerable groups of people, many of them with psychological problems, victims of human trafficking, torture etc. In the background of this wish is the empowerment of all individuals, which would enable everyone to live their own lives. Though there are many efforts to provide help, there are also many challenges. The biggest challenges are reflected in the day-to-day increased number of refugees. This means that people are in need for food, shelter, medical aid and most of all, many of them are travelling without any means. They come from the direction Evros river. As such they could be attained for illegal border crossing. If they manage to avoid the detention they run the danger ahead of downfall into homelessness.



However Mr. Koros took a retrospective towards the big problem in Greek administration regarding the detention, which is in his opinion still a big problem. Despite the building of Pre-removal Centers, which aimed towards the mass confinement of third country nationals in the conditions better than the condition in police stations, it could be seen that the detention in the police cells has not ended and the condition in general still lack compliance to above mentioned article 3. This highlights an ever present problem of inadequacies of detention conditions. Despite all these issues it has to be noted that the material, financial and managerial problems that the Greek state faces are not the reason for violation of article 3 of ECHR and it does not justify such treatment of refugees. Mr. Koros also emphasized that according to the national legislation the detention conditions and their adherence to fundamental human rights are a legal precondition of detention per se; that means that the continued detention in conditions which fail to fulfill the minimum guarantees for preserving the dignity of detainees deserves the description illegal. Furthermore Mr. Koros provided a practical example from a day before, regarding the squatting of Afghan nationals on the main square on Lesbos island, in order to demonstrate and draw attention on inhumane conditions in Moria camp. The party members of the Greek right wing party “Golden Morning Dawn” issued the public statement, calling openly for an attack against the Afghan nationals. At the end, the demonstrators were pelted with stones by the angry crowd. The demonstration broke out and some people were arrested.

In the echo with this example Mr. Koros returned to the services and aims provided by GCR. Although the detention remains the main concern of authorities, NGO’s are rising issues and trying to raise awareness about the legality of such practices, even within what has been termed as crisis. Provision of services to people who have been treated inhumane is and remains the goal of GCR. The organization is faced with the everlasting question: how to convince refugees and asylum seekers to stay in Greece after these vulnerable groups of people already faced the detention under horrible conditions. Foremost this is the reason why GCR attempts to challenge the detention supporters, by applications and interventions at the police, objections against detention in the court, application to the ECHR, interventions to the Ombudsperson etc. Mr. Koros emphasized one further problem which is the usage of different euphemisms in order to justify the illegal detentions. These would be hidden behind the “governmental services to unaccompanied minors”, “protective custody”.

GCR also takes part in various joint projects with Helsinki Committee with different international partners from Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Greece, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia concerning the detention of asylum seekers with psychological problems in these countries. He also stresses the inability of the Greek police, asylum services and authorities to deal successfully with the third-nationals who enter Greece. Instead they choose the least-effort principle, which results in illegal detention of refugees and asylum seekers, before they get the first opportunity to speak out before the responsible persons. Other big issues in human right violation are the pushbacks. GCR has been receiving complaints about pushbacks for years, while providing services in pre-removal centers, but also in other fields of presence and intervention. There also were the testimonies of people who were pushed





back after they applied for asylum in Greece. Some of them were moved from one detention to other and finally driven back to Turkish border and then pushed back. In order to support their campaign against pushbacks GCR published a statement on the February the 20<sup>th</sup> 2018 which is accompanied by a report including 12 testimonies of third country nationals who have allegedly been pushed back to Turkey. The group configuration differed from single men, to families, unaccompanied minors, victims of torture. According to testimonies, which GCR tried to verify before their publication, the pushbacks take place on the border with Turkey along the Evros river, as the refugees attempted to enter Greece, or even having entered the country or having applied for asylum. The testimonies manifest the similarities concerning the “informal procedures” and brutality of the incidents. According to Mr. Koros the reported brutality of incidents show that ought not to be addressed as false complaints, despite the Ministry’s absolute denial of involvement in such practices, which has been published by two lawyers.

In regard to the ongoing practices Mr. Koros and GCR predict that there would be less pushbacks and more detention in the mainland to come, decrease in possibilities of access to asylum and threat of growing xenophobia. In conclusion he stamped detention and pushbacks as normality again, but also as the constant challenge for the GCR and similar NGO’s who are working in the field of protection of human rights. These efforts by GCR are a call for patience and persistence.

**Evangelos Astyrakakis**  
**Heinrich Böll Foundation (selectrespect.org)**



The Heinrich Böll Foundation is a German foundation with the outpost and an office in Thessalonica. Heinrich Böll Foundation’s office in Thessalonica is active in the network of NGO’s which are working together on the human rights issues. Most of the speakers are the part of the network. Mr. Astyrakakis emphasized that actually all those who are really active and doing work in the areas where help is needed are part of the

SelectRespect network. He also took a look back at the situation in Europe after the EU Parliament election 2014, which led to foundation of SelectRespect network.

These are marked by the rise of populism in Europe. In order to raise awareness on the issue of growing racism in Greece a few NGO’s came together and started collaborating. The result of this collaboration is the support on the part of Heinrich Böll Foundation. The cooperation within the growing network has been good and the results showed themselves as better than expected. Within the initial network there were sometimes 2 or 3 NGO’s working together at the time but the cooperation did not include all the members at once until 2016 as SelectRespect network has been founded. One of the first ideas upon foundation of the network was the film festival with the human rights as the main theme. This festival has



been very well accepted and it added value to the cooperation of NGO's and served as a spring-board to immense the involved NGO's into deeper cooperation. As of November 2017 the network found their guiding principles and decided to focus more on the human rights in practice. In that sense they organized the conference which included many different NGO's, members of public administration, police etc. The main topics of the conference included the refugees, discrimination, and education. The conference received quite a resonance from the government and by the secretaries and ministries of Justice and Human Rights. The results of this conference ought to be published but they are not yet. Some of the aspects which came in conclusion consider the decision in sending an official letter to the ministries and public administration on the existing problem which refugees have, need for a renewed anti-racism campaign. In this sense the anti-racism legislation in Greece is a problem. The law addresses only race violence but the problem lays also in other forms of discrimination which are not covered. The main objective of the campaign target is to raise the awareness in the public (photo!!).

Mr. Astyrakakis describes SelectRespect network as the one of most active networks in Thessalonica. This network also helped to end the past competition between NGO's since the NGO's concluded that they can work much better together. The future plans of the SelectRespect Network include another film festival, a call for an annual general assembly, continuous meetings of all represented NGO's in the network, discussion about the projects, decision about creating of small work groups, whereas work-groups do not need to be present at every meeting etc.

As a representative of the SelectRespect Network, Mr. Astyrakakis wanted to know more about other initiatives, movements or projects from the other countries, in this case the partner countries involved in Europe4Refugees project because the network want to hear more and learn more about the employment possibilities for the refugees in other countries.

### **Exchange of experiences and best practices with the participants of the learning activity in Thessalonica**

**Hitzaker Dorf** - Out of their own experience the participants at the E4R learning activity in Thessalonica from NGO Hitzaker Dorf reported about their past efforts and program to employ the refugees in house construction. The problem of getting permission to build the houses has soon been identified. At the moment there is an established cooperative in order to train the refugees to get the language courses and receive training in practical skills. The main idea behind this project is to have sustainable possibility for people, in order to empower the refugees and all involved people to be self-sustainable.

**Hildegard Azimi-Boedecker, IBB e.V. Project Coordinator** - Mrs. Azimi-Boedecker gave some examples from the German practice. They include the support for the new comers to Germany in order to prepare them for the life in Germany. The refugees and asylum seekers are faced with various problems, from learning language, to get fit for life in Germany in total, which also includes education. This means that there are certain steps which need to be





taken which take effort and time. When the necessary steps are finished (vocational training, courses, even university education and employment) the former refugees and asylum seekers tend to have more time to get involved in civil society. As Mrs. Azimi-Boedecker emphasized the problem is that 75% of the persons do not make it through the vocational education as it demands a development of certain routine. Although there are some perspectives: Support:MI was a program developed at IBB Dortmund in order to train the peer-to-peer mentors. This should have enable people to get through the routine, to offer psychological help etc. At the moment there are attempts of inclusion in the job market in Germany, but the drop-out rate is high. There are also plans to try and support people to be trained as orthopedists, opticians, as well as to train the mediators who would be able to support the new comers in order to understand the system in Germany.

**Balint Josa, Szubjektiv, Budapest, Hungary** – Mr. Josa informed the group about the possibilities of inclusive workplaces for the immigrants, which also includes the second generation immigrants funded by Erasmus 2. These projects include internship programs for immigrants, in order to get the work experience and to enable them to get the job hereafter. The internships would be offered in social enterprises and small businesses, along with the training of how to start an own small business.

**Francesco Cirino, La Kasbah, Italy** – Mr. Cirino reported about the experiences from Italy, where all necessary information would be collected through the preparation program. In this manner the job training and the assessment could be conducted before the end of the program. Nevertheless there are also some changes announced which should improve the course of formalities. Also the financial support for the training would not be given directly to the beneficiaries but to the local stakeholders who are responsible for the training. Furthermore taking part in the training opens the new possibilities for other possible trainings. At the moment there is also a problem with the facilities, which puts an obstacle on the outcome of the program. Most of the participants of the program do not want to start own enterprise. In this aspect south Italy could be compared to Greece. Most of the people want to go away further north, as south Italy is a transit zone, just like Greece.



**Atle Sunde, Euromasc, Norway** – There are some pilot projects funded by Ikea Foundation, which support the refugees and asylum seekers in learning the language but also offers the possibility of training at Ikea. This again opens the perspective for a possible employment at Ikea Company.

**Hildegard Azimi-Boedecker, IBB e.V. Project Coordinator** – There is some perspective for the possible projects funded by Diakonie. These include the delivery of the trainings for immigrants, in order to enable them to become translators (so called sprinters) or self-employed. They would be used to help and support the people in the hospitals. Unfortunately there are some legal obstacles by Immigration office in Germany which prescribes the



refugees with the allowance for work, only in the cases if there are no German citizens who could practice this work. Furthermore Mrs. Azimi-Boedecker emphasized the importance of intercultural perspective for the progress of the discussion in the intercultural issues. The German society by itself is diverse and it needs the mutual understanding in order to make the work partnerships which can function by consensus. At the same time the role of the churches in Germany is important in the integration work and engagement in integration issues, unlike the situation in Greece in the social and intercultural engagement.

**14:00 Visit to the shelter for unaccompanied minors NGO Praksis, Thessalonica. Michalis Polyrakis Psychologist.**



The shelter operates since October 2016 with the capacity for thirty people. There are only boys living in the shelter. That happens because the unaccompanied girls are rarity. They usually come accompanied by a family member. There are staff-members working at the shelter 24/7 and among them are care-givers, social workers, psychologists, coordinator, a lawyer, three chefs and a translator. The social workers and the psychologists are also working on weekends. They work in two shifts. The first shift is from 09:00 to 17:00 and the night shift from 13:00 to 21:00 hours. If there is an emergency situation during the night, the care-giver makes a phone call to social worker or psychologists. The care-giver receives the advices on how to act, but if the advice shows itself as less helpful, then they would come to the shelter personally. Therefore the social workers and psychologists employed at the shelter for Unaccompanied Minors are on call even if they are not permanently at work. Beside the offices for the staff members, the shelter for unaccompanied minors has all necessary facilities: was room with two was machines, warehouse for food and clothes in the basement, living room for the protégés, play room, kitchen etc.

There are 30 protégés (full capacity) at the center. There are also the legal rules and regulations about how many mandatory square meters per person should be included at the various facilities. This law is also applied at the shelters. According to Mr. Polyrakis the shelter for unaccompanied minors Praksis Thessalonica fulfills also these standards. Among the protégés the youngest is currently 13 years old. Earlier there was a young boy traveling alone from Pakistan to Greece in order to find his father who was living in Thessalonica. He came to Thessalonica, he found his father and now they are living together. The shelter is providing the housing for the boys before they turn 18. There were some cases like that in the past and before they turn 18 the staff-members at the shelter are faced with some paper work. After they leave the shelter they are usually settled in one of the apartments provided by UNHCR. The protégés have no ID cards but the asylum-cards which serve the same purpose as the ID card. The longest time somebody stayed at the shelter is about 16 months. Last month two boys left for Switzerland for a family reunion. They stayed at the



shelter since November 2016 and they left in March 2018. Out of 30 boys 26 or 27 of them are enrolled in the intercultural school of Thessalonica, which is located next to the “White Tower” (one of the cultural monuments in Thessalonica), about 15 minute walk from the shelter, or they are registered at the other public schools with other entry level classes.



The staff members recognize the danger of conflict potential from the day one. The unaccompanied minors are coming predominantly from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, Algeria, Iran, Palestine, etc. However the largest number is from Syria, Afghanistan and Pakistan. This shelter for unaccompanied minors has only boys as protégés but there is also a separate shelter for girls, although they are not arriving as unaccompanied minors in such a high number as the boys. Therefore the staff members are trying to have the mixed rooms with the boys from different cultural backgrounds and this has functioned good until now. There are some occasional arguments and fights but none of them has got out of control. Some of the protégés asked to change room if they know that there are some other boys in another room who speak their language, but the staff-members are insisting on keeping their place in the designated room and after a while, these requests were off the table.

The staff members communicate with the protégés in Greek and English. They are trying to talk to ones who are going to stay in Greece more in Greek, but with the ones who are going for a family reunification the communication is preceded in English. This sort of communication is exchanged only about the basic issues. Normally the staff member engage an interpreters and translators for the important conversations, e.g. a translator will be used for the therapy sessions with the boys, in order that the provided information would be fully and exactly communicated between the collocutors. Mr. Polyrakis is employed at the shelter since October 2016.

Most of the protégés come on reference by the public prosecutor and the boys who live in the other shelters or camps; they are under the protective custody. According to Greek law, if the police find a minor without any documents and without any adult to accompany him, the minors would be taken and placed under the police custody in the police station. This procedure is called protective custody as it is supposed to protect the minors from the danger outside. It is pretty much an imprisonment. The police have no adequate facilities to accommodate the minors in the protective custody. There are some boys in the shelter who have spent seven to eight months in the protective custody. So either they are under the protective custody in the vicinity of Evros river, on the islands or the similar places all over Greece, or other shelters or camps, safe zones (situated within the camps as a special areas called safe spaces, where they have protected areas for unaccompanied minors). Usually the children who has some health issues are then directed to the shelter, for which is the public opinion that they serve to much better purpose in being the protective zone. That is also one of the reasons why there is a message board in the main house corridor. It contains all important information for the protégés, such as their activities (school, sports), important



information (e.g. reminder about having the ID card and other necessary identification documents anytime at hand, etc.). For example these reminders are also used as a self-protection, since the people with the different skin-color (according to Mr. Polyrakis) are controlled by the police more often. The number of the boys being under the protective custody is huge. The employees at the center heard from the boy who came to the shelter from the protective custody in the vicinity of Evros River, that there were about 80 unaccompanied minors held at the same unit at the protective custody. He himself spent seven months there. The criteria are pretty much health issues, psychological health issues, endangerment from self-inflicted injuries or even depression. There are the bars at the windows in the shelter but they belong to the UNHCR safety standards. They are not installed to prevent the boys from escaping. There is no need for the protégés of the shelter to think about escaping, since they are free to go outside from 07:00 to 23:00 hours and they were told from the day one.

The shelter is providing the housing for the boys before they turn 18. There were some cases like that in the past and before they turn 18 the staff-members at the shelter are faced with some paper work. After they leave the shelter they are usually settled in one of the apartments provided by UNHCR or other organization. Some months before the minors turn 18 the employees at the shelter help them with all the necessary paperwork in order to change the housing without major problems. They are then accommodated with two or three other adults. When they change the accommodation, they have their social worker who helps them with their case. They also have a legal advisor and some cash-assistance. Social workers and psychologist have a session once a week with the boys and the interpreters. They try to talk with them about their issues which bother them, but if the minors have plans to leave elsewhere and they would not back from their plans, the social workers and psychologists at the shelter help them as much as they can and provide them with all the necessary information. These information include among other the list of organization which could be helpful. It does not happen that the minors disappear without notice. What happens is that the minors should return at one given time and they come back a bit late. If the minor does not come back until 23:00 the care-giver will first call the hospitals and police stations in Thessalonica and then they would inform the designated person, who will try to contact the minor on his mobile phone and see what has happened. This scenario does not happen very often, though.

The responsibility for all the unaccompanied minors belongs to the public prosecutor in Thessalonica. They are all received with the referral by the prosecutor. But there are no cases of alcohol or drugs abuse. Mr. Polyrakis also stated that if we visit any school in Greece or Europe we would find the rate of alcohol or drug abuse relatively high. The drug abuse cases also occur with the protégés and the psychologist or social workers are having closed sessions with the boys. When they realize they can not handle it on their own, they are trying to contact external experts, e.g. the employees at the rehabilitation centers. In two cases we have contacted the local organization with much more experience in the drug-abuse treatments. In this case the boy has visited the organization twice a week with the



interpreter and he was invited to do some activities with the other youngsters visiting the center. It also takes time to be able to realize if the minors have some disability or if the living alone on the road or at the streets left some trace on them. And realizing this needs time.

**17:00: Jourgos Manolis, psychologist – coordinator of the “Filoxenio” – The center for asylum seeker families.**

Jourgos Manolis is the psychologist and coordinator at the “Filoxenio” – Shelter for asylum seeking families by NGO Arsis. This shelter represents cooperation between the Municipality of Thessalonica, as a program coordinator, and the NGO Arsis. All staff member at the shelter are employed at the NGO Arsis. There are seven rooms at the shelter with the capacity of up to 30 people. Each family has one room at its disposal and usually there are 3 – 6 family members in one room. Beside the private space in their rooms, the families are sharing the kitchen, toilettes. The center provides a catering and three meals per day, but the families are also invited to cook in the shared kitchen. The families are provided with the cash assistance card and they can buy groceries or whatever they need, apart from those items, which are already provided. As first we were able to visit the Kindergarten. There are 18 children at the moment at the shelter, 14 of them are visiting school in the morning. In the afternoon they have these rooms at their disposal. There are also volunteers in shelter who organize the program for the children from 18-20 hours. Usually these activities include arts and crafts activities for the children. The kindergarten is opened two hours in the evening (18-20 hours) and two hours in the morning, for the children who are not visiting school.



The resident families at the shelter at the moment are coming from Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria. These are also the countries which are usually hosted at the shelter. The shelter itself does not search explicitly for the families but the government sent the families to them. EKA is the governmental office for family and welfare in Greece. This shelter is the only shelter in Thessalonica, which deals exclusively with the asylum seeking families. The criteria to receive a place at this shelter include following: families, with at least one child, single-parent families (usually, there are mothers with 2-3 children), as well as single pregnant adult women (this category has not been hosted in the shelter until now). These families must be either asylum seekers or recognized refugees, they need to pass the necessary medical exams. The families are usually allowed to stay for six months at the shelter, although they can extend their residence for additional six months in two-times-a-three-months steps. This also depends on the possibility if they have some problems, which are the reason why they are not able to move out of the shelter after the expiry of six-month-period (e.g. problems with housing, finding an appropriate housing, etc.).

In the period of time the families spend at the shelter, they are taking part in the integration program, as they are supposedly going to stay in Greece. The support includes the Greek lessons for parents, meetings and empowerment of the family members in the search for





work. Mr. Manolis sees this as a bit of a problematic area for the families, who are not really able to go and live alone after they have spent one year living in a shelter. There are many difficulties and obstacles, which include the personal reasons or the reasons of the reality in Greek society. At the moment there are no families which are waiting in a family-reunification-program or family-relocation-program. The last families who took part in these programs left in December 2017. Those who were part of the programs spent their 6 months at the shelter and then moved further to other countries, usually to Germany, Sweden, Finland and Austria. But about 90% of the families went to Germany. The situation at the moment is very different; the families which are currently living in the shelter are going to stay in Greece and the concern about the possibilities for these families among the staff-members is great. The main reason for this concern is that the families do not want to stay in Greece, but they are faced with the reality and they know they have to stay in Greece, because they cannot go to another country. Even though they are aware of the situation the families do not want to stay in Greece. This is the reason why there is a conflict potential in their case, as the families feel forced to do something they do not want to. There are still the solutions to be found and the mechanisms to be made, in order to meet their needs. According to Mr. Manolis, this is perhaps the most often problem in Greece at the moment, concerning the future perspectives for these families.

The families who are already recognized as refugees are in process of waiting for their passports, in order to travel further to Europe. They are aware, that they cannot stay longer as three months but they hope they would be able to find some solutions in these three months, which would help them stay in one of the target EU countries. Most of their families believe about their better prospective in Germany for example. They comply with the tell-tales their acquaintances or members of the broader family tell them. This makes it hard to explain these families, that the realistic situation might look different. These beliefs are usually founded on rumors and unrealistically high expectations.



The participants at the learning activity and the external experts have also took a quick visit to the offices of the resident legal advisor and we got to know the resident translator for the Arabic languages and the social-worker trainee, who were present at the premises at the time of our visit. We also got introduced to a single father of five from Syria, who currently resides at the center. His wife died and he takes care of the children alone. The eldest is seven years old and the youngest is 8 months old. His goal is to get reunited with his sister, who is living in Germany with her five children, but his current prospective is that he must stay in Greece. The staff members attempt to find a legal way in cooperation with the partners from Germany, in order to help him go to Germany. The prospective is not optimistic and if it fails, he will go back to his parents, who are currently living on the border between Turkey and Syria. At the end of the tour, we came to the dining-room, which is not used by the families, since they prefer to eat in their rooms. The staff members need to be flexible sometimes, but generally they consider



that it is not good for the socialization of the families if all meals are separately. But it is also understandable to the staff members, since the families consider the shelter to be their home and the rooms as their private space.

The discussion found place at the classroom, where we entered through the dinning-room. The Greek lessons for the children and for the parents take place at the classroom. As the shelter had the families who went to Germany, they also received the German lessons in the classroom. There is one computer in the classroom, which is also used to train the children and parents in computer skills but also as a mean of communication.

Filoxenio was and is the first center which has been founded in Thessalonica. It has been founded in May 2015. The building where the shelter is situated and the costs are under the REACT program. The building belongs to the Municipality of Thessalonica, but all staff members are employees at NGO ARSIS. All costs are split between the UNHCR Program and REACT Program.

There were 37 families hosted from May 2015 until the day of our visit and approximately 140 people passed thorough the center. The families' countries of origin are predominantly Syria, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Egypt and Nigeria. Most of the families were from Syria and all the families from Syria who passed through the shelter are now in Germany. There are currently 6 families with 27 people in total residing in the center, out of which 18 are children (four of which are autistic). Since Filoxenio operates 24/7 and since they are a shelter for vulnerable families, the shelter is a host to the families with complex problems, from medical to psycho-social problems. The families who are delegated to the shelter are the families with multiple problems, who cannot live outside the shelter without support. There is no resident doctor at the shelter, but the families are supported and accompanied by staff-members when they needed to visit the doctor. 15 children are visiting school and the 4 children with autism are visiting the special schools.

Issue of integration is very difficult for the families in the center. At the same time it is hard to motivate families to get integrated in Greece. The second issue is what is going to happen to the families after the expiry of the 12-month period, when they have to move out of the shelter. Currently there are no solutions on this matter. As the summer in coming, there are more and more families coming from Afrin, Syria across the northwestern border of Greece. There is a big issue with the accommodation of these families who are still coming to Greece and off course the integration problem of the families who are going to stay in Greece. There are many homeless refugee families currently in Thessalonica and there are no accommodation schemes for them. The families seeking for a refuge are sent to the camps but there are no mechanisms to provide them with the basic living means, as well as absence of the basic mechanisms which could meet their needs. The prognosis by Mr. Magnolis is not optimistic – according to him, we are on a verge of new refugee crisis in Greece. It is very hard to integrate all the people in Greece without the support of the Greek government.





There are 10 volunteers supporting staff-member. Most of them are working in kindergarten but there are some other who are helping with Greek lessons. The legal aid at the shelter supports the families in all legal issues, including the accompaniment during the asylum-seeking process. During the asylum seeking procedure families are allowed to stay at the shelter.

In the beginning, as this center was founded, there were some problems with the neighbors, mainly visible through the complaints. There was no visible information about what kind of activity would be situated here. However another problem occurred as the time gone by. There is no visible communication with the neighbors and according to Mr. Manolis there has to be something done on this matter, in order to try and connect the people. Furthermore he stated, that It is good to have no problems but it is not good to have no communication.

According to Mr. Manolis there are some evident problems at all family shelters in general. There should be concepts which provide the same services for both groups, as for local population so for asylum-seekers. There are places here which had same situation. There is a feeling of complete insecurity there. The government is absent and it leaves a lot of pressure on the people in order to find, how much time it will take to get the situation sorted for the families. The employment is at the focus of these problems, since that is the main obstacle towards autonomy for many. The accommodation remains the focus for the future, since more and more people would be coming and there are no official steps made, in order to resolve this problem. The example of the new Balkan route has been brought up, which IBB found out of their own research about (**Note: Reports are in attachment**). The general opinion of the conference member is, that it is perhaps better for the refugees and asylum seekers to try and reach the Germany or any other target land.

The further comment of a group member was that the ban of residence in Germany for the people from Afghanistan. This issue is supported by the arguments, that there is no war in Afghanistan unlike in Syria. The certain initiatives by the German politicians include: the financial support for the returnees in their homeland, also the increase military presence, which would increase safety in certain areas, which are considered as unsafe. According to Mr. Manolis, there are many people who are Afghan by nationality, but who were born in Iran. Therefore, it is very hard to send these people to Afghanistan. As such they do not have any rights in Iran. This is the main reason why these people are send back to Afghanistan. According to E4R Project Coordinator Mrs. Azimi-Boedecker, the governments of Iran and Afghanistan made a bilateral agreement for deportation, relocation and renewed deportation of people. In order to avoid the deportation these people are attempting to reach the Western Europe. There are large number of people who were deported from Iran across Mashhad to Afghanistan into the areas they have never seen before. They are now stuck in this area, although some of them are trying to go back to Iran, or to emigrate to Pakistan or India. Of course the financial aspect has an effect on this decision. In order to avoid this, some attempt to find a refuge in Western Europe. This whole situation represents a big deal between Iran and Afghanistan.



As a coordinator, Mr. Manolis has a great responsibility. All employees at the shelter are working as a team and sometime it is hard for them to take a distance between the protégés at the shelter, since their relationship with the residents of the center is so intensive. This is normal, since the families are staying at the center for the period of one year. The work of the whole team at the shelter is attached to too many issues in different levels of a relationship. On account of this, there is a need to work as a team successfully, in order to help each other, also with the practical issues (e.g. garbage cleaning, wall-painting etc.). That is the reason why are the office doors always open. They are closed only in the matter of sessions. There are also a group meetings with the families every 15 days and the staff meetings are taking part every week. The staff members also must be very flexible in their work. Every 6-8 month there will be a of the work among staff members in order to meet the actual needs at the center. The change does not mean the change of the concept but rather the accommodation of the concept to meet the current needs of the shelter residents. For example: at the time when there were many resident teenagers at the shelter, the staff members organized the workshops for the teenagers. There are no teenagers at the shelter at the moment and these workshops would be unnecessary. Therefore, we had to change them, in order to meet the needs of the current population at the center.

At the end of the conversation Mr. Manolis gave his prospective for the future, supported through some key issues. What would happen in all European countries after some time? What kind of prospective opens for the people in all EU countries in 3-5 years? We are already in this phase, which considers the fact how are these people going to live together in the societies. All European societies are moving towards right and the xenophobia is a big problem. On the other hand it is different from area to area. When people finish the first phase and solve their residence issues, integration courses they leave the first phase. The second phase is the most dangerous phase of all. The high intensity issues suddenly mellow and people find themselves having suddenly a lot of time. This is the following: people forget that they are traumatized when they are in the first phase, because they have a lot to do. Suddenly after first year or two, these centers noted the increase in number of clients.



## 25.04.2018. – 3<sup>rd</sup> Seminar day

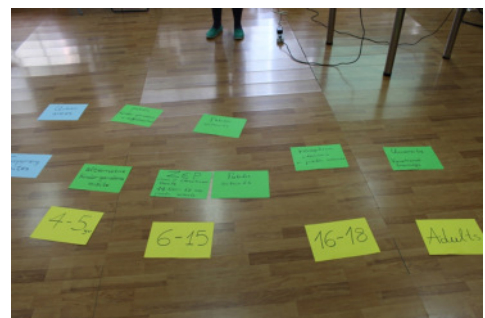
**09:00: Andromachi Besiri, NGO Antigone, Information and Documentation Center on Racism, Ecology, Peace and Non-Violence, Thessalonica.**



Mrs. Besiri works at NGO Antigone as an educator and as an organizer of educational activities. The information by Mrs. Besiri is provided on the topic of educational system and refugees in Greece. Closing up with 22<sup>nd</sup>.04.2018 there were 7497 sea arrivals this year to Greece. At the moment there are 51 000 refugees and migrants in Greece. 39 500 of them are at the mainland and 11 500 are on the islands. The islands are therefore important, because the educational system is not really functional there. The islands are also a stopover for the refugees on their way to mainland. The majority (up to 80%) of refugees on the islands are from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. In that sense there are different languages represented, from Arabic languages, Farsi and Kurdish. The remaining 20% are divided among other languages.

Importance of education for all these people is divided into protection from their risky journeys, to provide them with enough information in order to help them to find a job and to learn to read and write. Furthermore education helps them to find a job. It is really important to be focused on the educational system. Even the percentages of the people who arrive are not arriving out of that reason, but there is a need of providing them with the basic tools, in order to be able to make a living in Greece.

The educational system in Greece is a matrix. It is important to differentiate from temporary sites (reception centers or the hot-spots), which are also located in the urban areas such as hotels, or the accommodation provided by UNHCR. Besides, the hot-spots also include the homeless people and people occupying buildings. The children from temporary sites who are 4-5 years of age could be enlisted into the alternative kindergarten. They are inside which means they are in the camps. There are kindergartens which were established by the ministry of education and the children attend the classes there. So, they do not need to be transferred elsewhere. The children in the same alter in urban areas could be enrolled in the public kindergartens in their neighborhood.



The children from 6-15 years of age are the basic ones. On the temporary sites there are so called “ZEP (The zones of educational priority)” and this represents the new system with the new school year. This system started in November 2017. The children enrolled in this system do not speak Greek or they speak very little Greek. They are enrolled into the KISS schools.



These are afternoon schools located in the public schools in the Thessalonica center. They are giving lessons from 14-18 hours and they are focused on Greek lessons as a second language, English, math, sports, art and IT lessons. If there are children who already have attended the classes in previous year, this year they have to be enrolled into the public schools, which means they have to start the school in the morning and attend the school normally with other children.



The new regulation affects the students from aged from 16-18. Until the previous school year, there were no classes for this age. The ministry of education monitored all the people who arrived to Greece. This survey showed that the 16-18 year-olds are representing a big intake in the total amount of all the new-comers.

Novelty for all the children inside and outside the hotspots is that they can all be enrolled in so called reception classes. These classes include the public schools in the morning, but the children are working out of the classroom for few hours in Greek language and in English with the Greek students. The background of this project was by the Greek ministry of education. Their position was that the younger children could learn faster and easier as they interact with the local children. But for the ones who were supposed to attend the high education it was hard for them to attend the lessons in Greek language. The students can stay up to three years in the reception classes. It depends on the fact of how fast are they going to learn the Greek language.

There is also the new regulation for the adults, which means for the people who are older than 18. Again with the beginning of the new school year (2017/18) they have the opportunity to apply to the Greek university. It is not mandatory to speak Greek language. The reason is as following: for the enlisted students the first year consists of intensive learning of Greek language. From second year and beyond, they have to be fluent in Greek in order to be able to follow the lessons. There are also some vocational training for adults, but they do not belong to the program of the ministry of education. Instead they depend on NGO's or on the educational activities of some institutions.

This system is complex and it is important for the people to inform them about the way these procedures are coming in place. The responsible body for the education of children at the shelters is REC (Responsible Education Coordinators). Some of the coordinators are the employees of the ministry of education but they are working directly in the sites. They know all the children, all their ages and they enroll the children in schools. The families do not have to do anything, especially because all the public schools mentioned above are located in the same neighborhood in Thessalonica, but if the people do not have the proper information they cannot access them. For the children who are living in the urban areas the responsible for the education of children are the parents. That means that the parents need to go to the schools and take care of enrollment themselves. The ministry of education provided the flyer in all recognized languages, which contains the information about all the steps the parents



need to take care of inside the temporary site and also about the steps they need to do outside the sites. Actually, what the parents need to do is to bring the proof of residence the children medical card with all the vaccinations and some additional documents, including the asylum-seeker card. These three documents alone have to be given to the school principals in order for the children to be enrolled. The same rule is valid for the temporary sites but the REC's are responsible to receive all these documents in order to proceed with the enrollment.

Apart from the leaflet the same information is provided on the Refugee Info Web-Site. It is also available in all the Balkan routes information concerning the migration, it is also available in different languages and there are many categories, concerning the health-care, lodging etc. On the example "How do I get the bachelor degree in Greece?" we have seen all the provided information at the web-site, which are explaining all the legal steps and solutions. Besides they also inform the refugees about the legal situation the reasons behind it and also, what are the requirements. This web-site is very popular among the refugees and migrants which is also confirmed in the survey from 2017.

Another example regarding the available information on the web-site is the access to formal and non-formal education in off-site accommodation which means in urban areas (hotels, private apartments, accommodation provided by the UNHCR, occupied places etc.). Considering the children attending any kind of education in comparison to the total number of children, it is obvious that the 45% of children are not attending any education at all. That includes formal, non-formal and informal education together. Out of this information it is possible to assume, that 55% of children are attending education, out of which only 14% are attending the formal education. The remaining 41% are attending the non-formal education, which again means that the people are learning from the activities. These remaining 41% are showing the largest percentage of children who attend the education activities provided by NGO's and others. The most of the educational activities are focused on children from 6 to 14 years of age. This happens also out of following reason: Going back to the above mentioned leaflet, it could be seen that school enrollment does not oblige the families to stay in Greece forever. There was a tell-tale story for the new arrivals that they would be ask to stay forever in Greece if they enroll their children at schools. Since this is legally approved, that it is not obligatory to do so, the local stakeholders also need to advocate with parents and explain that the enrollment in schools does not necessarily means that they have to become the permanent residents in Greece. Furthermore this represents only one supportive activity for them.

Apart from that, one of the most frequently asked questions on the info web-site for Refugees is exactly the question of the obligatory permanent in case of the school enrollment. The explanation supports the above mentioned argumentation by Mrs. Beshiri. Unfortunately there was also no control over the contents of the non-formal educative workshops until recently as the Greek Ministry of Education took over the initiative required programs and basic information about the stakeholders involved in non-formal education on-sites and off





them too. In that sense the ministry of education passed the rule, according to which, the NGO's can access the implementation of their activities only if they are recognized by the Ministry of Education. This includes the activities from sport activities for children to the vocational trainings for adults. It is also true, that the Ministry of Education cut a lot of activities, since these activities were not labeled as educational.

There is also following important challenge: What is happening with the Greeks in the educational system? According to the report by Greek news provided by Mrs. Beshiri it is possible to see the reactions of some Greek parents regarding the enrollment of the refugee children in the public schools. It is also interesting to see that the first opponents of the enrollment of refugee children in the schools were the politicians from the party Golden Dawn (far right-nationalist party in Greece). The protesters tried to argue their right to protest by appealing on the health deficiency issues of refugee children, through the absence of vaccines, which would supposedly bring their own (Greek) children in danger of infectious diseases. What the leaders of this protests did not know was the regulation, according to which ALL children has to be vaccinated, in order to enroll into the schools which was another attempt to distribute the fake information and spread animosity among people.

Apart from all above mentioned problems is the absence of the available places for all the students. That means that the public educational system was not prepared for the enrollment of all these children into the public schools. But the Ministry of Education made an effort and succeeded to enroll all the students in the public schools until the beginning of December (instead of the end of August). There were also the cases of the principals who refused to enroll the children at the schools in the urban areas, arguing with the lack of available places. Furthermore this led to the initiatives which demanded the firing off the principal from his position, due to the spreading of animosity and xenophobia. Despite the availability of school places and enrollment possibilities in the schools, the parents decide not to send their children to the schools. There are many reasons for this decision: either the parents have difficulties to access the schools themselves. This also includes language barriers. Many NGO's are supporting these activities especially in the urban areas but they are not very controlled. We are talking about hundreds of families who are living in different places and they cannot be supported totally. The statistic is showing that this support is insufficient. It is also true that these families often say, that they do not feel really safe and therefore, they do not send their children to school. Otherwise the language barrier is also frustrating for the families.

The Ministry of Education also tries to find the new mechanisms in order to support the teachers. Most of the teachers are over 40 years of age and they are not very innovative in their approach to delivering a lesson. There were no further official steps undertaken and there were no special training offers (e.g. languages, pedagogical approach etc.). Nevertheless there were some interesting tool which could be used but they were not very supportive. There were some online materials considering the school education of foreigners



in the classrooms, although the main goal of almost all methods was the promoting of tolerance. According to Mrs. Beshiri the trainings were neither sufficient nor supportive.

According to Mrs. Beshiri, a NGO must apply for the financial support in order to receive it. The financing of educational activities considers mainly the support by the municipalities, either in rural or in urban areas. Ministry of Education focuses on support of public schools, which also contains the hiring more teachers in order to provide enough staff members for the multicultural classes. But the support by Ministry of Education does not include the financial means. These programs with teacher include ASSET and ZEP (Zones of Educational Priority) although for the latter the teachers need additional training, in order to apply to.

The public schools in Greece are free of charge and the school material (books, pencils etc.) are also provided by the schools. If some additional materials are needed, the families are obliged to provide them. In this case there are also organizations who provide these tool kits. Due to the fact that the public schools are located outside the refugee camps the children will be transported to the schools. The IOM (International Organization for Migration) is responsible on the whole Greek territory to provide the transport services for the children.

There are many good practices started by the NGO Antigone and these have also been used by other organizations both onsite and offsite. Very important task for the NGO Antigone is to provide the Greek language and Greek culture lessons to the adults in the refugee camps. The reason for the focus on adults lays in the matter of practical responsibilities (employment, responsibility for the family, etc.). It is also very important in order to maintain good psychological health and stability, by keeping the people in good humor, as they are in this sense empowered to take over responsibility and control over their own life. The lessons are held in the morning in the temporary sites, in the unofficial sites and under the permission by the Ministry of Education. There are also lessons for the students in the special supportive classes. These are unofficial educational activities, which focus on interculturalism, Europe, Greece, non-violence and legal issues. There are also legal advisors on the sites who provide information about the legal situation in Greece. There are also people who do not know of where exactly are they and what does it mean Europe, what are the human rights in Europe etc. NGO Antigone also works with the locals, what Mrs. Beshiri is proud of. The key words in this case are tolerance, coexistence, inter-culture, understanding and also, as a very important issue, the cultural mediation.

The target group in the schools are students both migrants and Greek students. These are all provided as a part of non-formal education workshops considering tolerance, human rights, non-violence etc. In order to provide the education in the public schools it is necessary to have the permission by the Ministry of Education. In order to get this permission one must be patient, as the obtaining of license is a long procedure. However, these licenses are valid for one year, which means that the clearance for the license has to be approved yearly, to begin of every school year.



One of the trainings considering the peer-mediation provided by the NGO Antigone is modelled after the trainings provided in Germany and it focuses on problem-solving capabilities among the peers themselves. The last project considers the Non-Conflict Resolution with the activities delivered in the reception classes in the schools, as well as in the Zones of Educational Priority. The young people are trained in order to solve the problems in nonviolent manner. The idea for this project came out of the observations by the teachers, who noticed increase and violence among the students, for the diverse reasons: different culture, different languages, different religions, different age groups, or even the different residence periods of time. The latter means that the refugees with the longer residence period of time on Greek soil are trying to exclude the new comers, or they feel superior to them. This kind of attitude will be given to their children, which brings the unrest in the classrooms. This project has been created in order to arbitrate the work atmosphere in the Greek classrooms to all students.

### **Visit to Polyclinic NGO Praxis, Thessalonica. Dimitrios Papaioannou.**

The visit to the Polyclinic at Praxis is hosted by the Social Worker and Coordinator at NGO Praksis. We would first visit the Polyclinic and thereafter we would have a small discussion. We visited the pharmacy, the medical office, where the patients only with an appointment could be received by ophthalmologist, pediatrician, cardiologist, who are paid by the NGO Praksis and the other medical experts are volunteers. The medicaments at disposition are given per donation. Only on few occasions they were able to buy the medicaments out of their own budget, or where the polyclinic received the sources especially for this purpose. The practicing psychologist was in session and we could not interrupt. Otherwise the group visited the kitchen and greeted the staff members and then we reached the conference room, where we took our discussion sessions.



The Polyclinic Praksis is situated in two buildings, which are connected to each other with the bridge. The medical services are set in the first building since its founding 1997. It has originally been founded as a place for offering the medical aid by the Doctors without Borders. AS the Greek division of Doctors without Border reconnected with the mother International Organization the NGO Praksis overtook all the activities and equipment left by the Greek Division of Doctors without Borders. In that sense the NGO Praksis overtook this program in 2014. Until then NGO Praksis had an emergency ambulance since the 1996. For the reason of the large numbers of immigrants in 1996/97 from Albania, Russia, Armenia and other countries the emergency ambulances have been established in Athens and Thessalonica. Greek Organization of Doctors without the Borders has been excluded from their mother organization, since they refused to move into the war in Former Yugoslavia and help the needy at this land. Praksis started in order to overtake all medical emergency programs, focusing on the Polyclinic in Athens and Thessalonica. Hereafter the program for



the beggar children has been called to life. The offices have been rented, not owned. The services provided at this building, apart from medical services, are psychosocial and legal aid. Praksis has another four locations in Thessalonica: The Accommodation for unaccompanied minors, the accommodation scheme for 100 houses, the day center for homeless people, as well as the accommodation for Greek families who face problems with economic crisis. All services provided by the Praksis are free of charge.



Most of the employees at NGO Praksis have been working for Doctors without Borders. The founder of the NGO Praksis has died a year ago. He worked as a mission director at the DWB (Doctors without Borders). As this division between the International organization of Doctors without Borders and the Greek one happened, the Mission Director Tzanetos Antypas overtook all programs formerly held by the Greek Division of Doctors without Borders and

founded NGO Praksis. Since Greece in 2004 did not have the large-scale migration, the target group has been mainly needy Greek population. NGO Praksis is mainly funded through other programs, such as European Program for Refugees. Up to 80% of funding is delivered by the European Union and 20% by the Government, in order to have the less bureaucratic relationship with the Greek state.

## Reflection and discussions



This last part of the learning activity included the impressions of these three days, comparison with Italy, observations, profit and the benefit of the learning activity, advocacy and distribution among the stake-holders, individual observation, knowledge and comparison to the own country. The methodical approach in this part included the work in the small groups, where the



issues could be discussed more individually. After about half an hour the groups returned to the plenum, where the conclusions of the work in small groups could be presented.



Out of these three days of learning activity in Thessalonica there were some obvious issues. One of the first observations is that the NGO's are left alone and the government support is not appropriate. In regard to this matter it has been observed that the refugees and asylum seekers are not properly informed about their rights of their cases. In the direct comparison between the situation in Greece in Italy it was obvious that there is no second appeal in case of negative asylum decision. Otherwise there are legal advisors and social workers at every NGO which the group visited in past days. It is also important to consider the fact that not all NGO's have legal advisors, but in case of Lesvos for example, there is a legal center but it is also not possible for every NGO to get the access to the legal advisor grated. That is also one of the reasons behind the good networking among the NGO's in Thessalonica. There were also some questions concerning the practice of a social work in Greece. These affected rather the possibilities for an access to the accreditation and possible lack of degree studies in social work in Greece. Concerning the legal aid there also was an observation according to which many legal advisors and lawyers are currently residing in Greece but they are not allowed to represent the clients before the court. One more important fact which came to attention is that the situation in Greece is very different from the position alone (different situation in urban or rural areas or on islands) which is the reason why it is hard to compare the situation to the situation in other countries.

#### **Direct comparison between the different European countries regarding the accommodation and access to the system:**

The accommodation in Greece is provided by the NGO's, in Italy through SPRAR system (used by La Kasbah), which offers the possibility and dignity to the asylum seekers to live in the apartment on their own. It also offers the freedom of movement, it enables movement but the persons are often endangered to fall under seclusion and separation. The accommodation in Germany is similar to the system in Italy, as the accommodation and mobility are provided. The difference is that the refugees and asylum seekers are not allowed to move from their designated county where they are registered, which causes many problems. First of all the refugees do not know the borders of the counties and if they leave their designated place of living where their freedom of movement is guaranteed within the borders of the county, they could get themselves into problems with certain restrictions. Greece also shows difference between rural and urban areas. More than 50% of children do not attend the school, although they are allowed to go to school, they do not have to if the parents do not allow them. This is the clear violation of Children Rights but also a clear disinterest on settling in Greece. On account of it, nobody knows if the teachers are prepared methodically to teach the refugee children, which could be interpreted as missing intercultural competence, which could on the other hand lead to the segregation in the classes. Beside all these pointed problems, the possibilities for education of refugees and asylum seekers in Germany, Norway and in Greece are much better than in Hungary. Yet Hungary has a obligatory education but the refugee children are not accepted in the schools, which legally means that the Children Rights are violated. Furthermore Greece shows the strong difference between the islands and mainland in the matter of education. There is a strong





presence of informal education, which is not suitable for children. On the other hand the state and the government do not support the teachers and show them how to deal with the cases, if they are going to be flexible in regard to the standards (language, grades etc.).

**Support system of professionals and volunteers:** The absence of government in help system is obvious. Based on the examples of right wing governments as in Hungary or Norway, the participants came to conclusion that it is sometimes good, if the government does not get involved in the help system. Based on the two above mentioned countries with the right wing governments, the government do get involved into the work of support system but it ends up in whole system being undermined and therefore also unsupportive. In case of Greece the government is pretty much inactive. The NGO's are setting an effort in order to apply for the EU funds, but the Greek government should do more in order to get the access to the EU funds, which would enable them to support the NGO's properly.

Due to the long history of nepotism and corruption in Greece in which scandals also some NGO's were involved lead to the point, that some NGO's avoid to describe their organization as NGO's, since this could awake the associations to the NGO's involved into the corruption scandals. The second problem which Greece has is that Greece is not united and in their relation to the EU Greece does not see itself as an equal member of EU. This leads to the increased critic by the young people about the problems with nepotism in the past. Through it are young people left with no perspective, due to the everyday problems and favoritism in Greece.

## **Conclusion**

The participants in Thessalonica are given an opportunity to get to know the different fields of work in this project from the intercultural perspective. It has also brought a new light on the general situation in Greece as well as in Europe concerning refugees (homelessness, accommodation problems, housing, access to health system, etc.) and created the opportunity to share different thoughts, ideas and models in the work with refugees by all involved partner organization from different European partner countries. In addition to that, it has been possible to make a direct comparison to the different systems in other European countries and also to see the similarities and differences of two learning activities – the first one in Cosenza, Italy and this one in Thessalonica, Greece. The point of concern is the non-formal education which is insufficient certified. On one hand the refugees receive accreditation for attending different courses, e.g. language course or a sewing course. Unfortunately these accreditations are not sufficiently recognized by the employers. This is one similarity with many other countries. This example also opens the possibility to create the standardized certificates for the accomplished trainings on European level which could be used for the further employment possibilities.



## Attachments:

### Greek court rules migrants must no longer be detained on Aegean islands in 'big worry' for EU



Refugees and migrants protest on Lesbos, demanding to be allowed to leave the island CREDIT: ANTHI PAZIANOU/AFP

**Nick Squires,ROME,**  
**James Crisp, BRUSSELS**

**19 APRIL 2018 • 4:47PM**

Refugees and migrants who cross by boat from Turkey to Greece's Aegean islands must be allowed to travel on to the mainland, a

Greek court has ruled, raising concerns about a fresh wave of asylum seekers to Europe.

The ruling comes two years after border closures and a controversial deal with Turkey shut down the Balkan migration route. It could act as an incentive for refugees, including Syrians fleeing recent attacks by regime forces, to head for Greece with the aim of reaching northern Europe.

The decision was met with fury, however, by the 15,000 asylum seekers who have been stuck in camps on the islands for up to two years. The ruling does not apply retrospectively and so they will not be allowed to leave until their applications have been considered - a tortuously long process. Under the new ruling new arrivals may be able to effectively jump the queue and go straight to the mainland.

Protests and riots have broken out in the camps in the past and container cabins and other structures have been set on fire amid rising tensions with authorities. "These people have already been exposed to extreme levels of suffering and they have received this news with anger and indignation," said Luca Fontana, a member of Medecins Sans Frontieres who works on Lesbos, where the Moria migrant camp holds three times more people than it was built for. "This decision only applies to the new arrivals and not to the thousands of people who have been trapped for months, sometimes years, on the Greek islands. This may lead to further tensions in already tense places like the overstretched Moria camp."

The ruling by Greece's highest administrative court, the Council of State, affects asylum seekers who reach the Aegean islands of Lesbos, Samos, Kos, Chios, Rhodes and Leros. It was handed down in response to a challenge launched by the Greek Council for Refugees, which argued that it was illegal and inhumane to keep migrants and refugees cooped up on the islands, which lie just a few miles off the Turkish coast.



The court found no "serious and overriding reasons of public interest and migration policy to justify the imposition of restriction on movement" of asylum seekers. The court said that newly-arrived refugees must not be detained in squalid, overcrowded camps on the holiday islands but allowed to continue by ferry to the port of Piraeus, near Athens. Yiannis Balafas, a deputy migration minister, said the ruling would "create some difficulties" and "create a new situation" for migrants who arrive from now on.

Migrants and refugees who make it to the Greek mainland could try to reach Western European countries such as Germany, which took in nearly a million asylum seekers, although the journey will be much harder than in 2015. Border controls have been strengthened and fences built along frontiers by countries like Macedonia, Serbia and Hungary. There is also concern about whether migration centers on the Greek mainland will be able to handle a fresh influx of people.

Without coordination, alongside systems in place to host these refugees in accommodation on the mainland, the risk is real that we would once again see thousands of refugees camped out at Piraeus port, homeless and with nowhere to go," said Jana Frey of the International Rescue Committee, a humanitarian organization.

In Brussels, an EU official told Reuters the court's decision was "a big worry". While the number of asylum seekers crossing to the Aegean islands is nowhere near as high as during the peak of the crisis in 2015, arrivals have increased in recent months. They are up 27 percent this year compared with the same period in 2017. The court's ruling, which may be subject to a challenge by the government, will do nothing to ease the suffering of asylum seekers living in metal containers and flimsy tents in the island camps, NGOs said.

"People there should be swiftly transferred to mainland Greece and out of such unacceptable living conditions," said Irem Arf of Amnesty International. This ruling also highlights the disproportionate responsibility shouldered by some Greek islands compared to other European regions."

Source: The Telegraph 19.04.2018 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/04/19/concern-mainland-europe-greek-court-rules-migrants-must-no-longer/>

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## **New Balkan Route across BiH**

**Four years after the migrant crisis, during which more than one million people reached the European coastline, the Immigrants are starting their way towards what is called a New Balkan Route – across Bosnia and Herzegovina.**

Running away from the wars and poverty in the Middle East, Asia and Africa, hundreds of thousands started their way towards Europe in 2015 and 2016 across the so called Balkan Route northwest from Greece.

This route has been closed in March 2016 and until recently, seldom Immigrants tried to avoid the journey over the mountains of Bosnia and Herzegovina. They rather took the route across Serbia, where they had to avoid the Hungarian and Croatian authorities in order to arrive to the desired destinations in the EU.

There is an alternative route opened now across Greece, Albania, Montenegro and BiH. According to the western diplomatic sources this route complies with the one used by the weapons and drug traffickers. In such manner they want to point out the existence of the human trafficking network.

Ahmed Wesam, an Immigrant from north-eastern Syrian city of Hasaka spoke to the France Press in Sarajevo a month after he started his journey, after paying the human traffickers to get him to Europe.

“One thousand dollars (ca. 800 €) for the journey from Turkey to Greece, 1000 € for the journey from Greece to Albania and so on”, said he.

According to the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 700 migrants entered the country since the beginning of the year. Almost 800 were stopped at the border. They were mainly citizens of Syria, Pakistan, Libya or Afghanistan. The authorities fear that the number of illegal immigrants could rise with the beginning of springtime.

“We do not have capacities to accommodate several thousand of possible refugees...although they do not want to stay in Bosnia” said recently the Chairperson of Council of Ministers BiH Denis Zvizdic.

Stephane Moissaing, the manager of the Doctors without borders in Balkan refused the speculations, according to which the migrant crisis from 2015 might happen again. However BiH authorities should “consider the situation in more humane way, in order to avoid the real humanitarian crisis”.

BiH has an asylum seekers center close to Sarajevo, with only 154 places.

“Situation is getting more complicated” said the Minister for Safety BiH Dragan Mektic and he emphasized that there are about 45 000- 50 000 immigrants between Greece and Bosnia



and many of those could try their luck through BiH. The border to EU member Croatia is 1000 km long and Sarajevo has only 2000 of border police members.

According to Nidzari Ahmetasevic, who is a voluntary worker active in work mit Immigrants in Sarajevo, the number of the Immigrants in country is at least twice as high as the official information.

“We are in contact with more than 300 people. We have found a solution considering the accommodation of about 50 of them, but we could fill at least two more houses” said she. There is a large house at the suburb of Sarajevo, which supposed to be the b&b. That is where Wesam and his family found their accommodation. They have separate rooms with the toilets. This house is secured by a Bosnian citizen, who lives abroad.

Samira Samadi (age 35) is one an immigrant woman who stays there. She left Isfahan at the beginning of 2017 together with his spouse. One member of the Doctors without borders controls her pregnancy.

“I want to go to Germany...but because of my wife’s pregnancy we can not go further”, said her spouse Anus Orak. “Most probably we will wait for the child to be born”. This couple tried to reach Croatia illegally but they found obstacle in rain and forests. As he already mentioned it, Wesam will start his further journey “in an week, perhaps in 10 days”. “I do not know how are we going to cross the border, but we will try and we will keep on trying. The way behind us is already too long”, said he.

<http://ba.n1info.com/a251128/Vijesti/Vijesti/>

28.03.2018

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## **GERMAN INTELLIGENCE ISSUED A WARNING**

### **THE PRESSURE ON BiH IS GETTING BIGGER; IS IT POSSIBLE THAT A NEW BALKAN ROUTE WILL BE GENERIZED ACROSS OUR BORDERS?**

Reuters

Summarized by Daniel Redman on 28.03.2018

The largest number of immigrants in BiH is from Syria, Pakistan, Libya and Afghanistan and BiH is getting more and more attractive for the persons from North of Africa.

28.03.2018.08:00

The border-crossing between Croatia and BiH is longer than 1000 km and it became a target for a growing number of immigrants, who are trying to reach the European Union.





Many sources, among which is also German Intelligence BND issued a warning according to which a new Balkan route could come into existence across the territory of BiH. The Balkan route has been closed two years ago, thanks to huge political efforts. The pressure on BiH is growing and the border-police announced that 639 persons have been caught after they crossed the border illegally and another 661 were prevented in their attempt.

<https://100posto.hr/news/migranti>

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### **HORRIFIC: New Balkan route is deadly for the Immigrants!”**

**Author: Tanjug**

**Date and Time: 10.02. 2018, 18:47**

**The newspaper “Jutarnji list” from Zagreb writes about new deadly Balkan route, across which the illegal Immigrants are trying to reach the Western Europe. These new route leads across BiH, Montenegro and Croatia.**

“Although this route is not publicly much spoken about, it is getting more active and it takes more and more human lives”. This has been stated in the reportage by “Jutarnji list”.

Croatian government treats the coming Immigrants as the individual cases. At the same time is the prevailing opinion in Slovenia that this could be a new branch of the so called Balkan route. In BiH is this route already held for granted and it has already earned a common name as “south immigrant route”.

It starts from Greece across the Albania. From Montenegro across the town of Nudo it leads into towns of Arandjelovo and Trebinje in Herzegovina. Using a public transport the immigrants travel to the places like Velika Kladusa and to smaller extent to Bihac. This corridor goes further on through the region of Karlovac. The Slovenian border is only 70 km further away from there.

The immigrants enter Slovenia in the area of Bela Krajina and Crnomelj across the river Kupa. “Jutarnji list” concluded that the facts are speaking for itself, that this is a new route across which the troubled people from middle eastern, Asian and African countries are trying to reach. This also happens with the large support of the citizens of Kosovo.

There were about 800 immigrants registered in BiH last year That is seven times more in accordance to the previous year.

Only every twelfth person came from Syria, although the people from Africa (Algeria and Morocco), Pakistan and Afghanistan are predominating. There were 202 immigrants caught in the region of Karlovac only in last year (the number has been doubled in two years). In January this year there were already 21 persons caught.



The number of people who are passing through Croatia is definitively much higher than the police statistics, mostly out of two reasons. As first there is a certain number of people which is registered in neither of the three countries. Second of all, if BiH and Slovenia are using the figures which are five times higher than the real one it is clear that Croatia should also consider these figures.

The difference is that the travel across Croatia happens usually by night. During the day the immigrants are hiding out of fear from Croatian police. According to that, the registered number is much smaller than the registered entries into the country.

These information have also been confirmed by the Slovenian police. At the area of responsibility of police direction of Crnomelj, the policemen registered only six cases of illegal entry across river Kupa last year, with the total number of 14 illegal immigrants. Only in January this year and the first week of February there were 22 registered illegal border crossings, with 112 immigrants.

“Jutarnji list” gives an example of dozens of cases, where the local inhabitants have seen the groups of people crossing the fields and forests and seeking the shelter in the empty weekend-houses. At least two cases of the illegal breaking and entering ended fatal.

All this is happening in the winter months, which are not suitable for such journey. According to the above stated information and also according to the information from Velika Kladusa, where dozens of immigrants are settled in private properties and in two mosques, it looks like Croatia could soon be hit by a real wave of immigrants, concluded the newspaper from Zagreb.

<http://www.alo.rs/nova-balkanska-ruta-smrtonosna-je-po-migrante/145696>

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## Agenda Project meeting in Thessaloniki 23-25 April 2018

### Monday, 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2018

- 09.00 Registration
- 09:30 Introduction to the Program E4R  
Hildegard Azimi-Boedecker (IBB), Vasilis Psychoudakis (Dialogos)
- 10.00 Introduction of new participants and members
- 10:30 Latest News about the situation in the partner Countries (Discussion)
- 11:15 Coffee Break
- 11:30 Healthcare situation for Refugees  
Dimitris Varadinis Praksis
- 12:30 Visit Naomi Ecumenical Workshop for Refugees
- 13:00 Lunch
- 14.00 Visit Refugee Day Center Alkyone
- 15:30 Visit Day Center Praksis
- 17.00 End of 1<sup>st</sup> day
- 20:00 Dinner



### Tuesday, 24<sup>th</sup> April 2018

- 09.00 Day 2 Welcome
- 09:15 All about Accommodation for Refugees in Thessaloniki Greece  
Mathilde De Riedmatten, UNHCR
- 10:15 Refugees detention conditions/ Camps  
Dimitris Koros, Greek Council for Refugees (GCR)
- 11.15 Coffee Break
- 11:30 Select Respect, Networking

Euaggelos Astyrakakis

12:30 Networking 13.00

Lunch

14.00 Visit Shelter for unaccompanied minors Praksis

15:30 Visit Temporary Shelter for Refugee families with minors (Toumpa)

17.00 End of 2<sup>nd</sup> day

20:00 Dinner



## Wednesday, 25<sup>th</sup> April 2018

09.00 Day 3 Welcome

09:15 Education system and problems with Refugees

Andromachi Besiri, Antigoni

10:15 Discussion: Comparison with the Italian Situation (what is different,/similar, worse or better?)

10:45 Discussion: Profit of the learning activity and results for our work at home.

11:15 Coffee Break

11:45 Evaluation

12:15 Discussion: Intercultural learning results. How to use results, ideas for

- clients consultancy
- adult education program/projects
- advocacy

13.00 Lunch

14.00 Visit: Medical Center For Refugees, Praksis

15:30 Bus trip in Thessaloniki

17.00 End of 3<sup>rd</sup> day

20:00 Dinner

## **Impressum**

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