



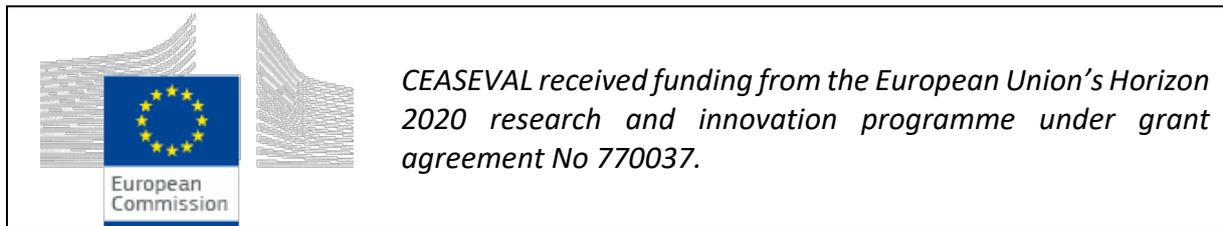
**National report on the governance of the asylum reception system
in Greece**

Angeliki Dimitriadi and Antonia-Maria Sarantaki

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National report on the governance of the asylum reception system in Greece

Abstract

Greece since 2015 is faced with an unprecedented humanitarian crisis as well as management crisis. As the number of arrivals increased and then reduced, the country was challenged to find ways of adequately addressing the needs of asylum seekers. The present report seeks to map out how the reception system of Greece is governed, and the role of localities (Cities) in this governance process. The report highlights the presence of a complex national reception system that is still in its infancy with high levels of centralisation as regards decision-making processes and high levels of decentralisation as regards implementation. The pioneering role of cities is also discussed, in seeking to contribute to the reception system, often beyond the limits of their mandate.

Keywords: first reception, asylum-seekers, centralised decision-making, divergent implementation, EU-Turkey Statement, municipalities, non-state actors

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Table of Content

Introduction	3
1. The Background: the Initial Design of the National Governance of Asylum Seekers' Reception and Main Reforms	4
1.1 The Initial Governance Design	4
1.2 Main Reforms Throughout the 2000s	5
2. Recent Processes: Governance of the Reception System and The Impact of 2015	7
2.1 Process of Decision-making	8
2.1.1 Main Revisions of the Reception System	9
2.2 The Formal Governance Structure Today	11
2.2.1 Types of Asylum Seekers' Accommodation	11
2.2.2 Competent Authorities and Actors Involved in Reception	12
3. Concrete Functioning of the Governance of the Reception System Today	16
3.1 National Governance Structure and Decision-making Process	16
3.1.1 Role of NGOs and International Organisations in the Reception System	18
3.2 Governance at Local Level: Two Case Studies	19
3.2.1 The Municipality of Athens	21
3.2.2 The Municipality of Thessaloniki	24
4. Policy Outcomes. Mechanisms of Convergence and Divergence in Policy Implementation	26
4.1 Conditions of Access to Services and Quality of Services	26
4.2 Monitoring	28
References	30
Appendix 1. List of official documents	35
Appendix 2. List of interviews	36

Introduction

Greece, from a major migrant-sending country in the 20th century, has witnessed the past decade its transformation into a migrant-receiving country. From the late 19th to the early 20th century following the economic depression of 1893, almost a sixth of the country's population emigrated (Kasimis & Kassimi, 2004). Similarly, in the post-World War II period and between 1950 and 1974, more than one million Greeks left the country due to economic and political reasons (Kasimis & Kassimi, 2004).

The emigration wave continued in the last decade, as, since the outbreak of the Greek debt crisis in 2008, more than 420,000 Greeks emigrated (Lazaretou, 2016: 40). Yet, this emigration tendency has been replaced by a significant immigration mobility. According to national census data, in 2011 there were 713,000 third country nationals living in Greece accounting for 6.5% of the total resident population (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2011). The largest immigrant group was Albanians (Triandafyllidou, 2014: 6-7). During the last two decades, irregular migration arrivals also increased (Triandafyllidou, 2014), comprised of mixed migratory flows of economic migrants and asylum seekers (see Table 1).

Table 1: Apprehensions data for irregular entry and/or stay 2013-2018, Greece

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018 *
Greek maritime borders	11447	43518	872519	176127	29464	15619
Total in country	43,002	77,163	911,471	204,820	68,112	42,416

Source: Compiled by author from Hellenic Police Statistical Data, available at: www.astynomia.gr.

*First 6-month data.

In 2015 the unprecedented arrival of roughly 850,000 refugees, intensified a pre-existing trend of Greece functioning as a transit country for asylum seekers (Dimitriadi, 2018). UNHCR reports that in 2015 and early 2016 more than 1 million refugees and migrants arrived in Greece (2018a) mainly from Syria as well as Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan (UNHCR, 2016: 3). Of those, the overwhelming number successfully continued their journey to northern Europe, with approximately 60,000 refugees and migrants estimated to be currently living in the country (European Commission, 2018a). The refugee 'crisis' of 2015 was multifaceted in Greece. It was a 'crisis' of numbers but predominantly a 'crisis' in reception management, which to an extent continues to this day (Dimitriadi, 2017). The realisation that many of those currently in the country will likely stay has brought a new reality posing severe challenges for the country's reception and integration system. In this context, since 2015, an institutional makeover and redesign has taken in place with various reforms. These reforms reshape not only Greece's asylum and reception policies but also its governance system.

The present report draws from literature review as well as extensive interviews with stakeholders and representatives of international organisations (IO), NGOs, Municipalities, and academics regarding the national and local governance structure of the reception system¹ in Greece. Overwhelmingly, the interviewees stressed similar difficulties, concerns but also positive steps that have been undertaken as regards reception in the country. The information collected regarding

¹ Reception in Greece tends to refer to accommodation and provision of basic services related to healthcare, food and psychological support. The term first reception is used in relation to services offered to new arrivals. Secondary reception refers to the services offered to those whose asylum application is under examination or have received protection, and post 2015 it tends to apply for those in the mainland.

decision-making structure as well as relationships between stakeholders, helps to shed light on a rather complex landscape dominated by informal relationships, attempts at compromise and a governance process where multiple actors interact, and at times overlap, in the provision of reception services both at first reception level (on arrival) but also on secondary reception (for those whose asylum application is pending and/or are recognised recipients of international protection).

1. The Background: the Initial Design of the National Governance of Asylum Seekers' Reception and Main Reforms

1.1 The Initial Governance Design

Greece as a member of the EU and a signatory party to the Geneva Convention on Refugees (1951) and its Protocol (1967) has concrete and absolute obligations in relation to the asylum procedure and the reception conditions of asylum seekers in Greece. The 2003 Reception Conditions Directive² and its 2013 recast, which constitute part of the Common European Asylum System, set out common minimum standards for the reception of applicants for international protection to ensure them with 'a dignified standard of living and comparable living conditions in all Member States' (Council Directive, 2003; Directive 2013).

The Presidential Decree (P.D.) 220/2007 that transported into the Greek legislation the 2003 Reception Conditions Directive stated that reception and accommodation of asylum seekers was within the competence of the services of the Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity. Until then, reception centres constituted area of responsibility of the Ministry of Public Order. With this P.D. the Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity became responsible for the implementation of a full set of measures for the reception and accommodation of asylum applicants including material reception conditions (P.D. 220/2007). In general, reception conditions are set to 'provide applicants with a standard of living adequate for their health, capable of ensuring their subsistence and protect their fundamental rights' (P.D. 220/2007). Accordingly, material reception conditions refer to accommodation in reception centres and financial allowance.

If an asylum applicant does not have enough means for private accommodation, the applicant should be housed in an accommodation centre or in another place of residence deemed suitable for hosting asylum applicants. The housing duration cannot exceed one year. Thus, the placement in reception centres is not obligatory. Instead, the asylum seekers can freely choose if they want to stay in the accommodation structures provided by the Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity or in another space, such as at a friend's house (Kanellopoulos & Gregou, 2005: 8-9).

According to P.D. 220/2007, reception centres are supervised by the Greek state, and particularly by the Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity. Their funding was through state budget or co-financed by the state and the European Refugee Fund (ERF)³ (Kanellopoulos & Gregou, 2005: 9). To this day, state-run reception centers are funded through the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and the Greek state. Regarding the regional distribution of the centres, and prior to 2015, most of them were located in the wider area of Attica region, such as in Aspropyrgos and Lavrio, whilst there was a limited number of reception places in rural areas, such as in Larissa and Fthiotida

² Hereinafter Reception Conditions Directive.

³ The overall funds distributed to the EU member states via the ERF for the period 2008-2013 were €630 million (DG Home, 2018).

(Kanellopoulos & Gregou, 2005: 12). The biggest and oldest reception centre was in Lavrio with a capacity to accommodate up to 350 persons (Kanellopoulos & Gregou, 2005: 4)

Despite these legal provisions and structural framework for the organisation and implementation of reception, the functioning of the reception system was problematic, especially due to the scarcity of reception places. In this regard, in many cases over the years the country has been criticised and condemned for its poor reception conditions and the shortcomings in asylum procedures (UNHCR, 2009; ECtHR, 2011; 2014; 2015; 2016; 2017).

According to an UNHCR report, in 2009 there were 811 reception places available in 12 reception centres (UNHCR, 2009: 10) and overall accommodation capacity in Greece was deemed 'grossly insufficient' (UNHCR, 2009: 10). Though all 12 reception centres were supervised by the Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity, only four were run by the state. The rest were run by NGOs with limited funding and sources. The operation of the reception centres run by NGOs was based on a case-by-case agreement between the NGO and the Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity and with ad hoc funding (UNHCR, 2009: 10). In 2009 alone 12,727 asylum requests had been lodged (Hellenic Police, 2009), with another 56,000 asylum applications pending from previous years (Greek Council for Refugees, 2010). In other words, demand for accommodation did not match capacity. As the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) noted, 'an adult male asylum seeker had virtually no chance at all of being offered a place in a reception centre' (ECtHR, 2011), leaving therefore many asylum seekers with no shelter. In this regard, ECtHR's judgment in the *M.S.S. v. Belgium and Greece* resulted in the suspension of all Dublin transfers to Greece, as the country's reception conditions were found in violation of Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights that refers to the prohibition of torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (ECtHR, 2011). In general, the reception centres were understaffed and under-equipped due to funding scarcity (UNHCR, 2008: 31). Furthermore, asylum seekers did not receive any financial support for daily expenses (UNHCR, 2009: 10).

1.2 Main Reforms Throughout the 2000s

Largely due to the *M.S.S v. Belgium and Greece* case, the Greek government presented to the European Commission a national Action Plan on Asylum Reform and Migration Management⁴. The Action Plan outlined strategic priorities for migration management and reception, including an institutional restructuring and reinforcement (Ministry of Citizen Protection, 2010). Law no. 3907/2011⁵ announced the establishment of three autonomous Services under the Minister of Citizen Protection; the Asylum Service, the Appeals Authority and the First Reception Service. Following that, the competence of reception was transferred to the First Reception Service and, as a result, to the Ministry of Citizen Protection. After many years, there was a recognition that the 'Hellenic Police, being responsible for border protection, did not have the capacity to provide reception services to all these people and examine their asylum requests as well' (Interview with Reception & Identification Service representative, 07.06.18, Athens).

The First Reception Service (FRS) became operational in 2013. It is composed of a central office/board and regional offices, including mobile units. Its task is to carry out reception of third

⁴ Renewed annually i.e. see 2011, 2013 and 2015 revisions.

⁵ The First Reception Service's operation has been supplemented by Law 4172/2013 and Law 4249/2014. The First Reception Service will eventually be renamed Reception & Identification Service. The report refers to the Service accordingly depending on the period of reference.

country nationals who are apprehended for illegal entry and/or stay in Greece. Thus, its mandate is for first reception exclusively. First reception, in addition to ensuring the immediate vital needs of the third country nationals, entails certain procedures, such as 'Identification, registration, medical screening and socio-psychological support, provision of information on their rights and obligations, and the referral of vulnerable persons' (Ministry of Citizen Protection, 2018). Hence, the First Reception Service (FRS) was responsible for the creation and operation of what became known as 'first reception centres' (UNHCR, 2014: 9), i.e. centres that undertake all the procedures discussed above and are directly under the purview of the First Reception Service. Furthermore the FRS was granted competence for the establishment and operation of open⁶ accommodation facilities for asylum seekers and third country nationals that enter irregularly the country but belong to a vulnerable group (L4172/2013). The first reception centres deal with the identification, screening, medical examination and the provision of basic information for newly arrived third-country nationals. Open accommodation facilities refer to short- and medium-term accommodation scheme that entail services of housing, feeding, psychological support and hygiene conditions (Reception and Identification Service, 2018). Moreover, the National Centre for Social Solidarity (NCSS-E.K.K.A.) that is, became the coordinating authority for the management of accommodation facilities for asylum seekers (Government Gazette, 2011). The NCSS is under the authority of the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Social Solidarity and responsible for the allocation to asylum seekers to available spaces (P.D. 220/2007; EASO, 2014) through the unit on Management of Accommodation Requests of Asylum Seekers and Unaccompanied Minors (Interview with Director of Social Protection, NCSS, 06.06.2018). The NCSS used (until 2018) to manage fourteen (14) structures for adult asylum seekers accommodation, operating at full capacity (Interview with Director of Social Protection, NCSS, 06.06.2018).

According to a study of the European Migration Network, in 2013, in Greece there were the following structures⁷ for the accommodation of asylum seekers: collective reception centres (usually camps), special reception centres for vulnerable groups (separate spaces for vulnerable groups), separate reception centres for unaccompanied minors, private houses, apartments and hotel rooms (EMN, 2013: 10-12). Most of these reception facilities were financed by the European Refugee Fund and the national budget. They were managed by non-state actors, namely NGOs, after the signature of individual Programmatic Agreements with the National Centre for Social Solidarity (EMN, 2013: 8). However, as far as the operation of these facilities is concerned, there were no uniform operating rules. Only for the first reception centres that were under the responsibility of First Reception Service, and therefore the Ministry of Citizen Protection, a General Regulation has been formed so as to define and ensure the standards and operating principles of the open accommodation facilities (Reception and Identification Service, 2018).

These dissimilarities that refer to different reception structures and funding schemes, different managing authorities, ad hoc implementing agreements and operating principles, led to increased differentiation with heterogeneous reception conditions in the accommodation structures (EMN, 2013: 8). In addition to that, the limited reception capacity unavoidably resulted in a prioritisation of accommodation requests based on vulnerability. This deepened the heterogeneity in the conditions of access to services and the quality of the services provided for the asylum seekers' population.

⁶ Open accommodation facility means that the hosted persons are free to enter and leave the facility whenever they want.

⁷ Apart from the official structures, in the past couple of years many buildings have been occupied by activists for asylum seekers and refugees' accommodation.

In October 2014, there were 1,063 reception places (UNHCR, 2014: 19), while the Greek government failed to reach the target of 2,500 places by the end of the year. At the same year, the Greek Asylum Service received 9,431 asylum applications (Asylum Service, 2018), widening the accommodation capacity gap of the national reception system. The reception situation worsened in 2015, as the country, whilst confronting an economic crisis, became the epicentre of the so-called refugee crisis, as thousands of migrants and asylum seekers started to arrive in Greece.

2. Recent Processes: Governance of the Reception System and The Impact of 2015

847,084 maritime arrivals were recorded in Greece for 2015, as opposed to 34,442 arrivals for 2014 (IOM, 2016). In parallel, these arrivals led to a significant increase in the number of asylum seekers. Greece registered 13,187 asylum requests in 2015 and 51,053 in 2016 (Greek Asylum Service, 2018), due to the closure of the Western Balkan route in March 2016. Hence, Greece, from a transit country, for migrants and asylum seekers that were aiming at reaching the countries of northern Europe, after the closure of the Western Balkans transit corridor, became a country of destination or prolonged stay. Following this, 50,000 third country nationals were forced to remain in Greece; a challenge for the Greek reception system (Civis Plus, 2018: 23).

These developments, in combination with the exceptional flows and the emergency character of the refugee situation, brought fundamental changes in the Greek asylum system and reception organisation. In 2015, the Greek government pledged to create 50,000 reception places of which 30,000 were to be created by the Greek state and 20,000 by UNHCR⁸. This boost in reception places was not only a condition of the EU reception directive, but it was also a necessary development deriving from the significant increase in asylum applications (Interview with IO representative, 08/06/2018, Athens).

In September 2015, the first camp facility for temporary accommodation started to operate in Elaionas, in Athens, after the Municipality of Athens agreed to hand over the land. Elaionas is state-run and supervised by the Ministry of Migration Policy. It was set up in an emergency content and was not designed for long term stay (see case study Athens Municipality, p 23). Following that, similar camps were established on old military grounds granted by the Ministry of National Defence, and on industrial properties, granted by the state or private individuals (Greek Ombudsman, 2017: 43). 40 camp-like facilities were set up. However, these facilities do not officially operate under the Reception and Identification Service's legal context, as they are not integrated within the L4375/2016 framework (Interview with IO representative, 08.06.2018). 'Until today, only three reception facilities are officially established under the Reception and Identification Service's legal framework' (Interview with IO representative, 08.06.2018, Athens). 'For the others there is still no establishment Act' and therefore no hierarchy and operating rules (Interview with IO representative, 08.06.2018, Athens). These omissions, unavoidably, impact the organisation of these facilities and the provision of reception services in the field.

The implementation of the EU 'hotspot' approach and the relocation mechanism as well as the adoption of the EU-Turkey Statement, were accompanied by amendments in the national legislation as well as by fundamental variations in the asylum seekers' reception based on their nationality as well as their entry date into the country in May 2015, in the European Agenda on Migration, the European Commission launched the 'hotspot' approach that enabled EU institutions to cooperate 'on

⁸ Through the ESTIA programme.

the ground with frontline Member States' in the processing of incoming migrants (European Commission, 2015). Moreover, it introduced a relocation scheme for an ad hoc and temporary distribution of refugees that entered Greece after 16 September 2015 to other EU Member States (European Commission, 2015).⁹ Finally, in March 2016 the EU-Turkey Statement was signed bringing another important change in the asylum context. The EU-Turkey Statement foresees that all migrants who arrived on Greek islands via Turkey or who are intercepted in the Aegean Sea after the 20th of March 2016 will be returned to Turkey, as Turkey is declared a safe third country (Council of the EU, 2016). These dissimilarities, as a result, have led to policy divergence and aggravated the heterogeneity in first reception implementation.

2.1 Process of Decision-making

The aforementioned developments impacted the institutional setting of the national asylum and reception system, the Greek government proceeded to a series of institutional and legal initiatives so as to adapt to the new institutional reality and reconstruct accordingly its resources. Hence, in November 2016 Greece created a Ministry of Migration Policy, separating migration and asylum from the Ministry of Interior and Administrative Reform (P.D. 123/2016). The Ministry of Migration Policy is responsible for the governance of all migration policy. Also, it represents Greece in the Justice and Home Affairs Council and in all relevant EU bodies and committees pertaining to migration. It should be noted that the Ministry has four hierarchical structures, namely the Minister, the Deputy Minister and two Secretary Generals; one for Migration Policy and one for Reception and Identification.

In March 2016, a Coordinating Body for the Management of the Refugee Crisis was established. This inter-ministerial body, composed by the ministries of National Defence, Citizen Protection, Migration Policy, Infrastructure, Transports and Networks, Marine, and the Ministry of Macedonia and Thrace has the task to organise and coordinate the management of migration and the establishment of reception centres (Ministry of National Defence, 2016; Left,gr, 2016).

Also, in April 2016 Law 4375/2016 was adopted to enable the implementation of the 'hotspot' approach and the EU-Turkey Statement. This Law introduces a partial reform of the asylum application processing based on fast-track border procedures (Law 4375/2016; Respond, 2018). Furthermore, it renamed the First Reception Service as Reception and Identification Service.

The Reception and Identification Service and the Accommodation Department of the Reception Directorate under the General Secretariat for Reception and Identification of the Ministry of Migration Policy became responsible for the establishment, operation and supervision of 'open temporary reception facilities' for persons who have requested international protection and 'open temporary accommodation structures' for persons who are under a return, removal or readmission procedure (L4375/2016). Five 'hotspots', or Reception and Identification Centres, have been created in the Eastern Aegean islands of Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Leros and Kos with a total capacity of 6,338 places (European Parliament, 2018).

The Greek government is responsible for the policy direction as well as implementation and management and this was noted by all respondents. The system is so centralised that most decisions are taken at a political level by ministers, and even senior public officials are not involved and thus, remain unaware of the process of decision-making. 'All the decisions about the organisation and the

⁹ Relocation applied to applicants from Greece, Italy and Hungary for which the average recognition rate of international protection at the EU level was above 75%. The program ended on 26 September 2017.

functioning of the reception system are taken by the Greek government. There is no formal obligation to consult other stakeholders' (Interview with academic expert, 20.06.2018, Athens).

2.1.1 Main Revisions of the Reception System

The 'hotspots', after the signature of the EU-Turkey Statement, transformed into closed detention centres. The newcomers were detained so as to be returned to Turkey in case they did not apply for asylum or if their applications were rejected.¹⁰ According to L4375/2016 newly arrived persons should be transferred to a Reception and Identification Centre, where they shall be 'placed under a status of restriction of liberty'. This refers to a 3-day restriction of freedom within the premises of the centre, which can be further extended by a maximum of 25 days if reception and identification procedures have not been completed (L4375/2016). This practice has been replaced by the implementation of geographical restriction that facilitated fast-track border procedures for the 'hotspot' framework application (Majcher, 2018). Geographical restriction means that the newcomers cannot leave the island where they registered until the end of their asylum process (Greek Council for Refugees, 2018a). Hence, they are prevented from reaching the Greek mainland and become trapped in the islands. This development has aggravated their frustration and created despair. Also, it impacted negatively on their physical and mental health. The poor food quality and the gaps in medical staff and means of transportation to the hospital hinder timely access to healthcare services (Greek Council for Refugees, 2018b: 38-40). In parallel, suicidal tendencies critically increased with self-harm incidents and suicide attempts that involved also children (Greek Council for Refugees, 2018b: 38-40)

Apart from the negative effects on the migrant and asylum-seeking population, the implementation of the geographical restriction in the aftermath of the EU-Turkey Statement has also put more pressure on the reception facilities. In June 2016, that is in the first trimester of the EU-Turkey Statement implementation, there were 8,450 migrants in the Greek islands, surpassing the reception capacity of 7,450 people (European Commission, 2016). The conditions in the 'hotspots' were considered as substandard with overcrowding, accommodation in tents or containers, poor sanitary conditions and water as well as light shortages (Greek Council for Refugees, 2018b: 32-36). The overcrowding, riot incidents within the hotspots and tensions between migrants and anti-hotspot protesters aggravated the situation in the Eastern Aegean islands. To remedy this, mayors called for the decongestion of 'hotspots' with the transfer of the population in the mainland (Ekathimerini.com, 2017).

Apart from the Eastern Aegean islands, there are also specific reception procedures in place for persons crossing the Greek-Turkish land border in Evros, although they are not subject to the EU-Turkey Statement. Hence, newcomers in Evros undergo reception and identification procedures at the Reception and Identification Centre (RIC) in Fylakio, at Orestiada, where they are being subject to a restriction of freedom of movement within the premises of the Reception and Identification Centre. Fylakio constitutes the only reception and identification centre located in the region of Evros. Yet, the flow of migrants and refugees in Evros has been on the rise in the recent past (Evros-news.gr, 2018). This is due to the fact that Evros is exempted from the provisions of the EU-Turkey Statement, which require the return to Turkey of all new irregular migrants entering the Greek islands from Turkey. In April 2018 2,900 people arrived in Evros (UNHCR, 2018b). Hence, Fylakio is

¹⁰ Migrants that arrived in Greece before 20 March 2016 were free to move to the mainland after their registration.

filled beyond its 240-person capacity raising concerns about the reception conditions offered there (Greek Council for Refugees, 2018b; UNHCR, 2018b).

Besides Reception and Identification Centres, Law 4375/2016 also provided the legal basis for the establishment of various accommodation facilities from different governmental authorities (Civis Plus, 2018: 23). In this regard, the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Migration Policy¹¹ may, by joint decision, establish open temporary reception structures for asylum seekers and open temporary accommodation structures for persons that are under a return procedure (L4375/2016). Open temporary reception facilities constitute a type of accommodation for third-country nationals or stateless persons who have requested international protection (L4375/2016). Open structures of temporary accommodation are for third-country nationals or stateless persons who are within a return, removal or readmission procedure (L4375/2016).

According to the Greek Ombudsman, in November 2016 there were 26,000 persons living in temporary accommodation facilities on the mainland (this includes camps), and 16,000 people in the five islands of eastern Aegean . Furthermore, 5,700 people were living in apartments under the housing rental program of the UNHCR and another 5,000 in other facilities funded by UNHCR, such as hotels, and guest houses, while approximately 9,000 people were outside accommodation facilities¹² (Greek Ombudsman, 2017).

The substantial rise since 2015 in the number of migrants and refugees that entered Greece and have remained in the country as well as the different procedures that have been put in place for the implementation of the ‘hotspot’ approach and the EU-Turkey Statement put pressure on the national system creating institutional and organisational challenges. Regarding reception, the spatial planning, setting up and operation of reception facilities became one of the most critical issues to handle.

In general, the state is responsible to provide asylum seekers with adequate housing conditions and suitable infrastructures. However, various problems have been reported in reception implementation, such as accommodation in inappropriate structures, like tents or containers, for a prolonged period; the use of former factories with hazardous industrial residues; inadequate sanitary conditions and the lack of infrastructure, such as hot water and heating during harsh weather conditions (Greek Ombudsman, 2017: 41-45). A prominent example of this problematic situation was Idomeni. More specifically, after the closure of the western Balkan route, between 6,000 and 9,000 people, became stranded in the Idomeni area creating a makeshift camp. These persons were sleeping in the open and with no hygiene conditions (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2016). The situation in Idomeni, was referred by the Opposition as ‘Dahau’ camp drawing a parallelism with Nazi concentration camps (Hellenic Parliament, 2016a; Hellenic Parliament, 2016b). The Police evacuated this informal camp in May 2016 after a hepatitis A (HAV) case was diagnosed by the Greek Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (KEELPNO). The evacuees were transferred to new government sites in the northern part of Greece, however, according to the UNHCR the conditions in some of these sites were below minimum standards (UN, 2016).

Over the years, many organisational malfunctions have been reported in different accommodation facilities as regards first reception provisions, because of ineffective coordination of the agencies involved and inability to monitor and/or attribute liability in cases of serious omissions (Greek Ombudsman, 2017: 44). As a result, the Greek state has not been able to ensure the provision of a

¹¹ Previously Ministry of Interior and Administrative Reform.

¹² Some of these persons may have left the country irregularly.

decent level of living conditions for all asylum seekers (Greek Ombudsman, 2017: 41), failing therefore to respond to its absolute obligations deriving from European, international and domestic Law.

2.2 The Formal Governance Structure Today

The governance of the reception system is rather complex with the involvement of various state and not-state actors. The most recent legal document that structures the formal governance of the reception system is the Law 4540/2018, which, in May 2018, incorporated into domestic legislation the recast Reception Conditions Directive (2013/33/EU).

2.2.1 Types of Asylum Seekers' Accommodation

According to L4540/2018 structures for asylum seekers' accommodation can have the following forms or a combination of these forms: accommodation in premises used for the purpose of housing applicants during the examination of an application for international protection made at the border or in transit zones; accommodation centres established in suitably adapted public or private buildings, managed by public or private non-profit organisations or international organisations; and private houses, flats or hotels leased as part of housing programs for applicants, operated by public or private non-profit organisations or international organisations (L4540/2018; Council of Europe, 2018).

The competent authority for reception, in cooperation with other state authorities, international organisations or social entities, is responsible for the provision of material reception conditions. The provision of all or part of the material reception conditions depends on asylum seekers' insufficient resources to maintain an adequate standard of living (L4540/2018).

Table 2: Types of asylum seekers' accommodation and responsible authorities

Types	Responsible Authority
RICs (Reception and Identification Centers) (hotspots in islands and Fylakio in Evros)	Reception & Identification Service (Ministry of Migration Policy)
Open temporary reception facilities	Reception & Identification Service (Ministry of Migration Policy)
Open temporary accommodation structures	Reception & Identification Service (Ministry of Migration Policy)
Camps	Ministry of Migration Policy
Apartments & buildings (ESTIA Programme)	UNHCR & partners
Apartments	NGOs, Municipalities (REACT programme)
Rented rooms and hotels	IOM, Ministry of Migration Policy
Houses, flats, hotels, hostels, guesthouses	Privately-arranged
Shelters and safe zones for unaccompanied minors and vulnerable asylum-seekers	NCSS, NGOs, IOM
Other places in accommodation centres/shelters	NGOs

Unofficial accommodation places	n/a
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Sources: Ministry for Migration Policy, Reception and Identification service, author compilation 2018.

2.2.2 Competent Authorities and Actors Involved in Reception

Reception of asylum seekers is, in principle, in the competence of the Ministry of Migration Policy, the General Secretariat for Reception and Identification and the Reception and Identification Service. The Secretary General for Reception and Identification¹³ is responsible for overseeing the Reception and Identification Service, while the Ministry of Migration Policy as a whole is responsible for the management of the reception system in Greece.

The Ministry of Migration Policy coordinates the camp-like reception facilities through two regional advisors, or put-differently, coordinators; one for North Greece and one for South Central Greece. However, their role is solely informal. Therefore, 'they do not have any signing right and are not included in the hierarchical structure of the reception system' (Interview with IO representative, 08.06.2018).

Overall responsibility for the accommodation of asylum seekers (minors and adults) is assigned to the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Social Solidarity, UNHCR and different NGOs. The NCSS (under the Ministry of Labour) constitutes the referral network that manages the accommodation requests for asylum seekers, especially minors¹⁴. UNHCR implements the EU-funded ESTIA programme, and different actors manage temporary accommodation facilities or are implementing partners to ESTIA (Greek Council for Refugees, 2018c).

Since the establishment of the Coordinating Body for the Management of the Refugee Crisis different Ministries have been engaged in the implementation and planning of reception, such as the ministries of Defence, Citizen Protection, Migration Policy, Infrastructure, Transports and Networks, Marine, and the Ministry of Macedonia and Thrace. A coordinating role was assigned to the Ministry of Defence regarding the transport, accommodation, catering and healthcare of refugees and immigrants (L4368/2016). Also, the Ministry of Defence allocated empty military facilities to host asylum seekers in Diavata and Cherso, Lesvos and Kos and contributed to the construction and operation of certain Reception and Identification Centres (Ministry of National Defence, 2016). Furthermore, as mentioned before, the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Migration Policy may, by joint decision, establish open temporary reception and accommodation facilities for persons subject to return procedures (L4375/2016) though this has not taken place yet.

Apart from state authorities, there are also international organisations involved in the implementation of reception. Since October 2015, UNHCR operates in the country running the ESTIA accommodation scheme and providing cash assistance. Initially, the ESTIA programme referred to the provision of accommodation to beneficiaries of the relocation programme. However, since 2016, it has been expanded to Dublin family reunification candidates and vulnerable applicants. The ESTIA scheme provides rented housing to asylum seekers and refugees in Greece based on vulnerability (UNHCR, 2018c). In November 2018 UNHCR had created 26,526 places in 4,427 apartments and 23

¹³ Despite multiple requests, we were unable to secure an interview with the Ministry.

¹⁴ Under the new Law, NCSS's role for the accommodation, social care and protection of unaccompanied minors will be reinforced, whereas it will start to disengage from the area of accommodation for adult asylum seekers. Furthermore, NCSS has been appointed as the national coordinating authority within the national referral system for victims of trafficking and smuggling (Interview with Director of Social Protection, NCSS, 06.06.2018).

buildings, in 14 cities and 7 islands (UNHCR, 2018c). Moreover, since April 2017, 68,110 individuals have received cash assistance ranging from €90 to €550 (UNHCR, 2018f). To implement the ESTIA programme, the UNHCR cooperates with 10 NGOs¹⁵ and 9 local authorities¹⁶ (UNHCR, 2018g). It should be noted that ESTIA's regulative framework has been developed by the UNHCR and its partners without the Greek state's involvement. As a result, ESTIA has diverse standard operating procedures and processes than the other national reception structures. This 'aggravates the heterogeneity for asylum seekers reception' (Interview with IO representative, 08.06.2018).

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) constitutes another actor with practical and operational involvement in the field. IOM until August 2017 supported Greece with camp coordination and management services as well as reconstructed accommodation facilities (IOM, 2018a). Furthermore, IOM has been Site Management Support (SMS)¹⁷ actor in various reception structures, such as in Elefsina, Malakasa, Kavala, Serres and Andravida (UNHCR, 2018d). Currently, to decongest the Eastern Aegean islands, IOM is implementing the 'Filoxania' action for the provision of emergency shelter and protection services through the activation of 6,000 places in hotels in the mainland (IOM, 2018b).

Moreover, there are various NGOs that offer accommodation spaces, such as Nostos funded through the EEA Grants¹⁸ asylum programme in Greece (EEA Grants, 2018) and Arsis running Filoxeneio in collaboration with the Municipality of Thessaloniki as well as Estia Prosfygon for families and vulnerable asylum seekers. Estia Prosfygon has been financed by the ERF under the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Social Solidarity and later the UNHCR (Interview with Local Coordinator for Refugee Shelter for Families (ARSIS), 02/11/2018, Athens). Praksis and Arsis also operate apartments through the ESTIA programme. Furthermore, NGOs act and have acted as SMS actors in various reception structures, like Oxfam in Epirus; DRC in Skaramangkas, Lesbos, Volos; Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund (ASB) in Diavata and Katsikas (UNHCR, 2018d). However, these organisations, being SMS actors, do not have the legal competence on who will be sheltered. For instance, they cannot permit new asylum seekers to enter and be housed in the camp facility or officially register the persons already residing in the camp. Residents must have already gone through registration and allocation via the Reception and Identification Service. This creates confusion regarding accountability and responsibility of the actors involved in reception (Interview with IO representative, 08.06.2018).

This parallel involvement of various state authorities and non-state actors has led to an organisational complexity¹⁹ (Greek Ombudsman, 2017: 45). In general, the Ministry of Migration Policy is responsible for the overall supervision and operation of the facilities. Furthermore, a head of unit is appointed for the management of the structures, given that they operate at unit level (L4375/2016).²⁰ The head's task is to 'coordinate, provide guidance and monitor the work of the staff

¹⁵ Praksis, Arsis, Nostos, Solidarity Now, Iliaktida, CRS, Intersos, Metadrasi, Médecins du monde and Greek Council for Refugees.

¹⁶ In Athens, Thessaloniki, Leivadia, Crete, Trikala, Karditsa, Larisa, Nea Philadelphia, Nea Chalkidona and Tripoli.

¹⁷ The SMS concept has been introduced in 2017. It refers to the organisations that undertake site management support at camps (Interview with IO representative, 08.06.2018).

¹⁸ The EEA Grants are jointly financed by Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway.

¹⁹ For instance, Chios (VIAL), Ritsona and Oinofyta in Viotia, Polykastro in Kilkis.

²⁰ According to Article 11 of L4375/2016 'open temporary reception structures for applicants for international

working in [temporary reception facility] and ensure its proper functioning in cooperation with other authorities and bodies' (L4375/2016). The management of the majority of these structures has been assigned to IOM, UNHCR or to NGOs (Greek Ombudsman, 2017: 45). This competency overlap creates organisational challenges and hinders any comprehensive coordination. Furthermore, the different actors involved in the various accommodation structures as well as the type of the structure creates a 'fluid' context altering the reception conditions that exist in the facilities (Greek Ombudsman, 2017: 41).

This multi-actor involvement and scattered setting of reception management is also reflected in the funding scheme. Overall, since the beginning of the refugee crisis in 2015 and until November 2018, the European Commission had allocated over €525 million in emergency assistance and €561 million under the national programmes for 2014-2020, including the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and the Internal Security Fund (ISF) (European Commission, 2018b). Moreover, 29 projects were funded under the Emergency Support Instrument (ESI) for a total amount of €644.5 million (European Commission, 2018c). These funds were managed by different state authorities that were implementing the actions, such as the Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Migration Policy, First Reception Service and Asylum Service (European Commission, 2018b). It should be mentioned that the shelter field was allocated most funding of the ESI budget reaching 42% (European Commission, 2018c). To streamline the efforts in this sector and move to multi-purpose solutions, the ESTIA programme became the 'flagship' of asylum seekers' accommodation. For 2018, €155 million became available to the ESTIA programme by the European Union Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid (DG ECHO) having as aim the creation of 27,000 places by the end of the year (UNHCR, 2018h).

The substantial funding sources also attracted many NGOs that started to operate in the country providing not only reception but also a wide spectrum of assistance. Similarly, the UNHCR office in Greece expanded to 600 people (The Guardian, 2017).

However, despite the amount of funding for Greece, the country did not use all the available funds due to delays, organisational deficiencies and lack of coordination (Greek Ombudsman, 2017: 46). Furthermore, the involvement of various state actors in fund supervision, such as a Special Secretariat for AMIF and ISF funding coordination within the Ministry of Economy, Development and Tourism,²¹ a Department for the Implementation of Reception Programmes within the Ministry of Migration Policy,²² and a Special Service of Coordination and Management of AMIF and ISF National Programmes,²³ seemed to hinder the funding management and fund absorption rate (Greek Ombudsman, 2017: 46-47). Moreover, the urgent character of the funds, by nature, triggered short-term strategic actions for immediate relief or temporary assistance. Yet, the continuous arrival of refugees and migrants and their prolonged stay in the country require a different planning with a

protection and the open temporary accommodation structures shall operate at the level of a unit. They shall be headed by a civil servant or private person who shall hold a university degree with capacity and experience in management and/or specialization in the field of human rights; s/he shall be appointed by decision of the Director of the Reception and Identification Service or shall be employed by the State by a fixed-duration works contract for one year, following an open call of interest by the Director. In the case of Open Temporary Reception Structures for applicants for international protection, the appointment of their Head shall take place following a recommendation by the Director of the Reception Directorate of the General Secretariat for Reception' (L4375/2016).

²¹ Established by L4375/2016

²² Established by L4375/2016

²³ For more information see Special Service of Coordination and Management of AMIF and ISF National Programs, 2018

long-term policy perspective that can deal also with their distribution across the country, as well as include integration measures.

According to NCSS, since January 2018, 1,530 places, of which 1,101 for unaccompanied children, were available in 58 reception facilities (Greek Council for Refugees, 2018c).²⁴ Also, UNHCR had created 26,526 places as part of the 'Emergency Support to Integration & Accommodation' (ESTIA) programme (UNHCR, 2018c). Yet, for 2018 the Greek Asylum Service registered 54,698 asylum applications (Asylum Service, 2018). During her visit in Greece, in June 2018, the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe reported thirty-one reception structures and six reception and Identification Centres in Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Kos, Leros²⁵ and Fylakio (Council of Europe, 2018), while 20,441 people were accommodated in apartments and buildings via the UNHCR ESTIA programme (Council of Europe, 2018: 4).

Based on UNHCR site profiling in September 2018, there were the following open reception structures: in Attica: Elefsina, Eleonas, Lavrio, Malakasa, Schisto and Skaramangkas; in Central Greece: Oinofyta, Ritsona, Thiva and Thermopiles; in Central Macedonia: Alexandria, Diavata, Kato Milia, Lagadikia, Nea Kavala, Serres, Vagiochori and Veria; in East Macedonia and Thrace: Drama and Kavala; in Epirus: Doliana, Filippiada and Katsikas; in Thessaly: Koutsochero and Volos; in Western Greece: Andravida and regarding the islands, in Lesbos (Kara Tepe) and Leros (Pikpa) (UNHCR, 2018d). In general, camps have functioned as a temporary reception solution so as to increase the accommodation capacity and respond to urgent needs. Despite the Greek government's intention to terminate camps' operation moving the population instead in rental accommodation schemes, camps continue to host asylum seekers and migrants. Also, many persons still live under unsuitable and overcrowded conditions (Amnesty International, 2018a; UNHCR, 2018e). For instance, in December 2018, during winter, over 12,500 people were still living in tents or containers in the islands of Lesbos, Samos, Chios, Kos, and Leros (Amnesty International, 2018b).

To sum up, the current governance of reception in Greece is particularly complex. Different ministries and state authorities undertake actions and cooperate for the same purposes, with different departments and General Secretariats, which are responsible for various elements of the reception system, while several NGOs undertaking implementation. Regarding decision-making, decisions are made and issued by the central government, namely by the competent ministries and/or the Ministerial Council chaired by the Prime Minister. It should be noted, that the government does not have any formal obligation to consult other stakeholders or build consensus (Interview with academic expert, 20.06.2018, Athens). As a result, a centralised decision-making is followed. However, even in this centralized context, there are different ministries and state authorities that are involved in the decision-making process, such as the Coordinating Body for the Management of the Refugee Crisis and, at least indirectly, the actors responsible for fund supervision. Furthermore, the Greek government needs to implement specific EU actions and to manage the available funds. This has led to a 'tug-of-war between the Greek executive power and the EU institutions' (Interview with academic expert, 20.06.2018), given that the EU institutions provide Greece with economic assistance to manage the migration challenge, while the country needs to absorb these funds effectively and manifest concrete results in this domain. As for implementation, a pluralistic picture emerges with the involvement of various types of actors involved in the reception field. Hence, various state and non-state actors, such as NGOs,

²⁴ Information provided to Greek Council for Refugees by NCSS.

²⁵ Also called hotspots.

international organisations as well as the EU, engage in the implementation of reception, providing reception services, funds for reception as well as running reception centres. This describes a pluralistic venue for the implementation of reception with a multi-actor involvement that further aggravates the complexity of this reception governance.

3. Concrete Functioning of the Governance of the Reception System Today

3.1 National Governance Structure and Decision-making Process

Despite the numerous actors involved in reception in Greece, the national governance structure and decision-making processes appear straightforward. Our interviews with stakeholders as well as available literature confirm that decisions are taken at Ministerial level and stakeholders are rarely consulted regarding the political decisions even though they will often be asked to implement them. There is a tendency to develop consensus with UNHCR- the main partner of the Greek government in the implementation of the reception system as well as with local authorities. It is worth noting that almost all the available literature that examines directly or indirectly the governance process of migration in Greece focuses on the outcomes, i.e. the policies and the actors that implement them with little attention paid to the process itself. This is to be expected since in Greece migration and asylum have always been governed through horizontal networks that bring together the public sector- namely Ministries and on occasion relevant agencies- and NGOs that implement or complement the decisions adopted. In line with this, through the interviews we sought to identify how the different actors and levels, collaborate, reach consensus or face disagreements and the broader power relations (Caponio et al, 2018). Thus, the following section derives overwhelmingly from the empirical research for the purposes of the project (see interview list in the end).

One of the NGO's interviewed, noted that those responsible for migration related decisions (i.e. Ministries, public policy officials etc.) have is a general 'lack of knowledge' of migration and that 'before 2015 they didn't really care enough to create a national reception system; after all there was no emergency. In 2015 the positive outcome is that we begin speaking of a national reception system. The problem is that those who attempt to design it, know very little about migration, or reception' (interview with NGO representative, 15/06/2018 Athens).

There appears to be different levels of centralised governance in place, however they don't necessarily work well with each other. There have been repeated changes in the leadership of the Ministry of Migration Policy and so far three directors from the First Reception Service have quit, largely out of frustration 'of being ignored' (interview with IO representative, 10/06/2018, Athens) The interviewee highlighted that particularly in 2016, decisions and attempts to coordinate were informally taken by the international organisations in Greece, the European Commission representation in Athens and the Minister of Migration Policy though a process of semi-formal consultations (for example weekly or monthly meetings). Since the Greek State does not implement directly the reception policy but relies on implementing partners, it is often essential to bring them early in on the decisions being made and attempt to have a broad consensus or at least the appearance of consensus.

The significance of working groups and consultation fora is important when seen in the highly centralised framework not so much in relation to decision-making but for coordination of the implementation process. Stakeholders manage to exchange their views, difficulties they experience at the implementation stage, raise concerns but also exchange best practices. One of the International Organisations representatives however distinguished the coordination between

international institutions, NGOs and civil society actors and the coordination of all these actors with governmental authorities (Interview, international organisation representative, 08/06/2018 Athens) particularly until 2016. The interviews overall highlight the problematic coordination from the State level of the non-state actors, and attribute it to lack of clarity over who is the responsible authority for reception-related issues. As noted by one interviewee:

‘Following the decision of the EU Leaders’ Meeting of 25 October 2015, the Greek government agreed to set up approximately 30,000 reception places. Due to the urgency at the time, the option of collective accommodation schemes [term used by interviewee] was selected, such as refugee camps. These camps became operational with the help of the Greek army. 40 camp-like facilities were set up. Despite the fact that Law No. 4375 of 2016 provides that the Reception and Identification Service is competent to operate open reception facilities, the camps are not covered by L4375/2016. Until today, only three of these reception facilities are officially covered by the legal framework. For the rest, there is no establishment Act, i.e. they have not been included in the law. This raises various challenges, since without appropriate legal framework no hierarchy, management and operating rules exist’. (interview, international organisation representative, 08/06/2018 Athens).

Nonetheless, since 2017 when the Ministry of Migration Policy became fully responsible of reception, the decision- making hierarchical structure and responsibility became clearer. There is systematic consultation between the Ministry and non-state actors, however ‘though reception is centrally governed, in practice the Greek State is absent’²⁶ (Interview, international organisation representative, 08/06/2018 Athens), which poses a challenge as the central governance level continues to consolidate the decision-making power but also responsibility (for example see below discussion on NCSS).

The Ministry of Migration Policy has deployed two regional coordinators, one for North Greece and one for South Central Greece. However, neither has the mandate or legal capacity to proceed to changes in policy, and in fact the coordination is ‘informal’ (ibid). The regional coordinators do not belong to the hierarchical structure of the reception system, they are advisors to the Minister for Migration Policy. For most of the open refugee camps that exist in the mainland, the RIS has no legal competency over and as a result, arbitrary actions are regular occurrences.

As with the decisions around reception policy and implementation, the funding and allocation of resources rests with the ministries. Most have set up internally separate financial departments to process funding requests regarding reception management. In contrast, the Reception and Identification Service has not done so to this day, resulting in significant delays of payments to the RIS.

The official government body that receives, processes and is responsible for overseeing the accommodation of adult asylum seekers as well as unaccompanied minors is the National Centre for Social Solidarity (NCSS), under the Ministry of Labour, Social Insurance and Social Solidarity. NCSS is a social institution, and approaches accommodation ‘from the social care and social protection dimension’ (interview with Director of Social Protection, NCSS, 06/06/2018 Athens). In practice, this means that unaccompanied minors are treated as children and not as refugee children, i.e. they would be protected irrespectively by virtue of being minors and therefore NCSS does not examine whether they have applied for asylum before processing the accommodation request, but the Centre

²⁶ The interviewee refers mostly to absence of personnel on the ground, consistent monitoring mechanisms, and funding (funding has come from DG Home and DG Echo)

does consider their vulnerability while processing the request. In this, NCSS pursues a differentiated approach. For children, the inherent vulnerability of the minor is enough, irrespective of the asylum status. For adults, in contrast, NCSS will only process accommodation requests from persons that have applied for asylum.

The NCSS includes a service for the management of accommodation requests of asylum seekers and unaccompanied minors. 14 structures (Facilities) were managed by the service and each was operating at full capacity even before the 2015 crisis. The new accommodation scheme ESTIA (see p.12 for analysis) contributed positively in the creation of additional spaces. A new law recently adopted transfers the responsibility for accommodation from the NCSS to the Ministry of Migration Policy, with the former acquiring a reinforced role in the protection of unaccompanied minors. EKKA will manage the accommodation requests for unaccompanied minors²⁷ and a special Unit will be created within EKKA for the protection of minors. The Unit will have three divisions- accommodation, coordination of unaccompanied minor's guardianship process²⁸ and an evaluation unit overseeing the quality of services provided to unaccompanied minors.

3.1.1 Role of NGOs and International Organisations in the Reception System

Though decisions are taken at a central and in fact political level, NGOs and International Organisations are responsible for implementing the policies adopted by the Greek State. It is worth noting that there is no official list of the actors involved the reception services. Thus, acquiring the information and identifying what role every non-state actor has in the governance of reception is particularly challenging. Many NGOs that were active in 2016 are no longer involved as implementing partners, and for those with significant presence still in Greece their role has drastically changed.

Before 2015, some NGOs were active in the reception of asylum seekers, primarily by operating shelters for adults and unaccompanied minors. The refugee crisis of 2015 changed drastically the landscape and now most NGO and International Organisations are either funding and/or implementing first and second reception services (i.e. on arrival and through the asylum process). Civil society contributes also to the work of the Reception and Identification Service, which deploys mobile units at key entry points to help on arrival (for example medical aid, blankets, water, food and initial information on rights). The mobile units are comprised largely by staff contracted by NGOs and an example of this is PRAKSIS, a major Greek NGO that currently supports first reception services to newcomers-third country nationals in Greece- by staffing with the trained personal the mobile units of the RIS offering information, medical screening and psychosocial evaluation.

Most of the international NGOs that deployed to Greece in 2015, did so in response to the emergency unfolding at the islands of northern Aegean but also the land border with FYROM. The commitment of the government to create 50,000 spaces materialised but in the form of refugee camps. The camps, initially located in northern Greece, became operational with the assistance of the Greek Army that was utilized both for identifying appropriate locations but also for setting up the camps and providing the catering. The Army was brought in due to the 'crisis' mode and the need to create accommodation spaces within a short period of time. Normally for provision of services by

²⁷ At present there are 50 structures for UAM across Greece. 27 are in Athens, 4 in Central Macedonia, 3 in Eastern Macedonia and the rest across various islands including Crete, Chios, Samos and Lesbos.

²⁸ Greece does not have a guardianship program. Until now, the Courts automatically appoint the judge in each prefecture as 'guardian' of the minor, which has created significant difficulties. Law 4554/2018 adopted a guardianship system for the first time.

subcontractors an open competition is required. The Army is excluded from the regular procedure all public entities must utilise and has its own internal pool of contractors that can be used at a moment's notice. Nonetheless, the deployment of the army for the creation of accommodation spaces was unprecedented for Greece. Furthermore, accommodation was in the form of camps, unfit for long term stay given that they were previously military camps, warehouses, deserted buildings etc and do not comply with the minimum standards under the EU Directive' (Interview, representative of an International Organisation, 8/06/2018 Athens). Though NGOs and International Organisations lack competence over the location and set up of camps, they have proved critical in ensuring access to basic material conditions for asylum seekers²⁹.

There seems to be a formal and an informal level of cooperation with the central level. Formally, organisations like UNHCR and IOM have signed memoranda of cooperation and in turn have identified implementing partners to offer various services related to reception (e.g. Solidarity Now, Praxis, Arsis to name a few) and have also partnered with international NGOs (e.g. Danish Refugee Council, Norwegian Refugee Council, Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund and Oxfam) to provide reception services to the islands and mainland. In practice alongside the formal system runs a parallel informal system, whereby the Minister(s) or Head of the RIC or the General Secretariat of the Ministry of Migration Policy, approach directly the head of the NGO or IO and ask for assistance. The latter 'usually mobilise to the best of their abilities and try to assist, to also maintain good working relationship with the Greek government and facilitate their work in the country'(Interview with International Organisation representative, 10/6/2018, Athens.)

Overall, all respondents declared that the NGOs primarily, but also international organisations proved crucial in reception on the islands and in reception offered within the Reception and Identification Centres where they provide legal aid, psychological and social support, age assessment, vulnerability assessment, language training for interpreters, interpretation etc.

Medical care is also an aspect of first reception that is provided by medical NGOs, from medical aid, vaccinations particularly to minors, however in the RIC's medical care in 2017 was removed from the hands of NGOs and responsibility was transferred over to the Ministry of Health. The latter, in consultation with the Ministry of Migration Policy and having secured European funding from AMIF for the special program "PHILOS" managed by Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, has assumed the overall responsibility for the healthcare of refugees / asylum seekers and immigrants who are in Hotspots and the pre-removal centres.

3.2 Governance at Local Level: Two Case Studies

Despite the rather high level of centralization as regards decision-making, some cities have arisen as pioneers in Greece in their efforts to both participate in reception but also lead the effort on integration- the end goal of reception.

It is important to stress once more that Municipalities have no legal competence over reception, integration or any migration-related issues. On the one hand, this has not prevented Municipalities from participating in reception-related services. On the other hand, there is no uniform approach between Municipalities since participation in reception services is not obligatory for all. The Central

²⁹ Some NGOs like ASB have taken the responsibility for constructing longer-term camp facilities, such as the one taking place at Diavata Anagnostopoulou. ASB will be providing shelter for 936 individuals in 156 modular container (50 provided by Caritas Hellas Germany) units and 30 UAMs in rehabilitated premises in the camp, a total of 966 refugees (see Dimitriadi, 2017).

Union of Municipalities of Greece for example, the body that convenes all municipalities, does not engage on the refugee issue.

The power of the local level in allowing for reception services and especially housing to be set up was highlighted in discussions. It is worth noting that there have been localities that refused to cooperate with organisations in setting up camps. The divergence appears more a result of biases, lack of understanding how reception places work as well as fear of locals in having asylum seekers in their area. Thus, objections are less politically motivated and more a result of limited information and fear (Interview with international organisation representative, 10/6/2018, Athens). The cities that do participate in the national reception system but also in transnational cities networks (TCNs) do so due to a combination of factors: necessity, a result of the volume of migrants arriving and/or transiting from these cities; the will of the local mayor and his/her team; the outward-looking focus of the city broadly (participation in various transnational fora); and the willingness of the local population.

Municipalities in Greece are governed by the Mayor, and the City Councils which usually are made up of groups with different political orientations, not always affiliated to a Party. Most Municipalities (referred to also as cities) do not actually participate in reception as cities do not have a mandate on reception. As such their involvement is less a question of political orientation and more of needs, and the personal interest/leadership of the mayor. All interviews highlighted that Municipalities depend on the political will of the majority in the Council to participate in the reception framework and there are plenty of cases of cities with significant reception issues that have been unwilling to undertake such commitment. There is little data on whether the City Councils reflect the public perception on how migrants are seen (in other words it is impossible to know the orientation of the public as regards migrants) since there has not been a reflection on this across Greece. However, discussions with stakeholders indicate that there have been times when the City Council's decision to engage with reception services was not well-received by the locals, suggesting a gap between political will and public perception on migration. The last regional and municipal elections took place in 2014, before the refugee crisis, with the next ones due in 2019. Thus, the refugee crisis of 2015 did not alter the composition of the City Councils, though it did contribute to a shift in the governance structure of the Municipalities involved in reception that developed additional units to manage reception. Similarly, to Municipalities, Regions in Greece also have no legal mandate on reception and integration and as will be discussed, where they support cities on reception they do so outside their mandate and authority.

The two local case studies chosen were Athens and Thessaloniki, the two main urban centres of Greece that have also led the way as regards reception. Both cities have what could be considered as progressive leadership. In both cases the majority is made of progressive and/or centrist representatives, but they also have a minority representation of Golden Dawn- the extremist far-right party which is also anti-immigrant. Both have been on the receiving end of the largest number of migrants. Athens, as the capital city of Greece, has a long history of receiving undocumented migrants and asylum seekers that either seek temporary shelter and employment or opportunities for settlement. Thessaloniki, similarly, with the added role post 2015 of the main transit and smuggling hub (Dimitriadi et al, 2015) on the way to Idomeni and the Western Balkan route. Athens receives directly those arriving from the islands, with Thessaloniki largely on the receiving end of arrivals from the land border with Turkey in the Evros region. Both cities have witnessed social fragmentation and exclusion of migrants in specific areas and both at one point in the past four years

have had hundreds of migrants camping out in public spaces such as parks and squares due to absence of state-run reception facilities. Finally, both but in different ways are active in engaging with cities within Greece and across Europe, seeking to exchange best practices but also develop better their resilience as regards migration.

The decision-making process in both cities (and in fact across all Municipalities) appears to be straightforward and in line with the hierarchy of the Municipalities, i.e. the Mayor proposes policies backed up by the group he/she represents in the Municipal Council that in turn votes. Outcomes depend on who holds the majority. What both Municipalities highlighted is that their involvement in reception was a direct result of immediate needs and the emergency that unfolded in Greece in 2015 but also a product of 'political leadership' which is undoubtedly the determining factor to understand why some Municipalities participate and others don't. Equally important is '[..]funding. Those who understood how to submit and attract funding sources were more willing to participate than others' (interview with NGO representative, 15/06/2018 Athens). Both case studies highlighted that despite the is cooperation with the public authorities and civil society, in the end decisions on migration rest with the Ministry of Migration Policy.

3.2.1 The Municipality of Athens

As highlighted earlier, the Municipality has no competence in the reception of asylum seekers, and any engagement rests solely on the political will of the Mayor, as well as Vice-Mayor for Migrants, Refugees and Municipal Decentralisation, the City Council but also a result of need. It is important to note that a lacuna existed as regards the governance of reception not only at a national but also at local level and it is a lacuna that the City in partnership with NGOs and UNHCR sought to fill. The political will of the parties that participate in the Municipal Council is crucial in the decision-making process as well as implementation. The group that is in the majority allows for the policy to pass and be implemented, which in this case is the group of the Mayor Kamini. This, however, also means that changes in the next Municipal elections (scheduled for May 2019) have the potential to impact the policy pursued and activities implemented.

Nonetheless, the city of Athens has been a progressive city as regards migration for more than a decade. Athens, joined the Eurocities network as early as 2008, partnering up in the ImpleMentoring scheme to encourage the integration of migrants at a local level through exchange of best practices between cities. In 2011, the Migrant Integration Councils (MIC) were introduced, an element in a major reform that took place in regions, prefectures and municipalities across Greece known as the Kallikratis program. The mission of the MICs is to inform the municipal government about the problems that the migrants face in the respective region, to present proposals for actions aimed at the integration of the migrants in the local government and policy-making structures, and to assist migrants in accessing the regional and municipal services. They have no decision-making powers but serve as a contact for cooperation between municipal authorities and migrant associations.

Migrant communities were asked to participate and bring forth issues related to integration. In the City of Athens, the Council on Migrant Integration was created via law 3852/2010 and the first Council meeting took place on 31/05/2011. The Council has since met 13 times and has issued decisions and recommendations that have been forwarded to the Municipality to implement.

However, the municipality got involved in reception only in 2015, as 'there was no [national] reception system before' (interview with Representative from the Athens Municipality, 31/5/2018, Athens) to be involved in. All interviewees stressed that the decision to get involved with reception

of refugees was a difficult one and was taken by the Mayor Kaminis himself (the former head of the Greek Ombudsman). Though it constitutes a change to the past, as regards involvement with reception, it is not an institutional change but a political change. In other words, the Municipality still lacks the mandate and legal framework to fully operate on issues of reception and integration. It retains jurisdiction on the Migrant Integration Councils but not on reception nor integration. The political decision sparked various heated debates both in the city council but also amongst local community and city districts between those in favour of engagement with refugee management and those against. Overall, however, the Municipality's willingness to become active in the field of reception and assist where possible has been favourably received.

One of the first concrete steps taken by the Municipality was the creation of a Unit to address issues arising from the increased number of asylum seekers transiting Athens in 2015. In fact, 'the refugee situation, with people living in public spaces having no access to sanitary and hygienic conditions' interview with Head of Department from the Athens Municipality, 15/06/2018) pushed the City to take steps in assisting. An example of this was Victoria Square in 2015. Situated at the heart of Athens, on September 10th 2015, media reported roughly 2,000 people were forced to camp out in the square³⁰. At the time, roughly 5,000 persons disembarked daily in the Pireus harbour. Absence of organization, with no pre-existing system in place and no coordination from the Ministries, the different Municipalities of the Attika region sought to identify temporary solutions on their own. Funding for reception was highly centralised in 2015, and under the jurisdiction of the Greek government and relevant Ministries. This meant that for Municipalities to become active, they also had to identify independently funding sources. The City of Athens was a pioneer, actively pursuing funding from private donors but also engaging directly with the Ministry of Migration Policy.

The City created a Vice-Mayor for Migrants, Refugees and Municipal Decentralisation position and sought to increase the personnel (in the past there was only one employee). Additionally, a special department exists today for the support and inclusion of migrants and refugees. Of immediate urgency was accommodation, one of the crucial aspects of reception and the most severely lacking in Greece (not just for refugees but for Greeks in need also) and the Municipality of Athens was the first Municipality in the Attika region to offer space for the accommodation of asylum seekers. The city offered a space located in the area of Elaionas where the first open reception centre was created. The center is under the management of the Ministry of Migration Policy. There is continuous presence of medical personnel, interpreters and social workers in the centre that is considered one of the best ran in the country as well as presence of the Municipality that maintains a watchful eye over the running of the centre as well as ensuring clean and hygiene conditions. The agreement with the Ministry is renewed annually following also agreement by the Municipal Council³¹.

An additional initiative of the municipality was the Athens Coordination for Migrant and Refugee Issues (ACCMR). Funded by the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, the ACCMR coordinates the civil society actors that operate in Athens and are involved in the reception and integration of refugees and migrants. The Municipality coordinates the stakeholders offering a forum where they can exchange best practices, problems, overlaps in services offered and generate new ideas for collaboration.

³⁰ ProtoThema, September 10 2015. *the refugee camp of shame in Victoria Square*, available in Greek at: <https://www.protothema.gr/greece/article/507898/deite-eikones-apo-ton-kataulismo-tis-dropis-stin-plateia-viktorias/>.

³¹ Based on interviews with Representative from the Municipality of Athens, 31/05/2018 Athens, with Vice-Mayor for Migrants, Refugees and Municipal Decentralization Municipality of Athens, 22/05/2018 Athens and Head of Department in the Municipality of Athens 15/06/2018.

UNHCR also participates in the ACCMR, with IOM also having recently joined. The Ministry of Migration Policy also attends through a representative. Five (5) working groups exist: urban refugees and integration, legal, health, education and livelihoods working groups³². The working groups meet once a month and a full forum with all participants takes place on average every three months. The ACCMR has created an electronic platform that seeks to facilitate efficient coordination between the Municipality and stakeholders engaged in reception. It currently has 80 members, most NGOs that are implementing partners on health, livelihoods, accommodation, integration and legal assistance services.

The Municipality participates also in other concrete activities that relate to reception and integration. The Municipality supervises the Public Benefit Job Creation Programme, of the Manpower Agency of Greece. The program offers jobs in reception centres. In 2018, the City supervises 109 people from more than 10 job profiles that work in reception centres in various fields including cleaning services and social services. The Municipality also cooperates with the RIS in order to coordinate its activities not only with the public authorities but also with NGOs that operate in the reception centres.

In the context of the National Strategic Reference Framework³³ community centres have been established for the provision of social services and in certain municipalities (i.e. not solely in Athens) where the migrant and refugee population are significant in number, these centres can include Migrant Integration Centres (KEM). In Athens, the Migrant Integration Centre became operational in February 2018 and it is still in development pending recruitment of interpreters and specialized staff. Thus far, it has been equipped with one psychologist and two social workers, with UNCHR assisting with legal counselling. Additionally, the Municipality provides reception services to any refugee or migrant that visits the Migration Integration Centre and offers information as well as advice on accommodation options. In its two-month operation more than 600 people have visited the centre and benefitted from its services. However, it is worth noting that the Centre does not cater exclusively to asylum seekers but all migrants, and this is part of broader approach undertaken by the Municipality that seeks to include not only new arrivals to its services and/or asylum seekers but also economic migrants as well as those who have opted out of applying for asylum but may very well be considered vulnerable and/or non-returnable.

Overall, the City of Athens cooperates, aside from the Ministry of Migration Policy, with a wide network of NGOs but also with UNHCR. UNHCR is a critical actor with which cooperation has been established and often the City will seek lobbying and advocacy initiatives even via the UNHCR for issues that concern the role of Municipalities as regards reception.

As regards **consensus**, there are two levels interviewees noted. On the one hand there is the question of cooperation with civil society but also with the Ministry. In both cases consensus is achieved through discussions and as highlighted in the discussions with various representatives, usually a compromise is achieved. As noted by the Vice Mayor for Migrants, ‘consensus is a heavy word. There is an attempt to reach an understanding’ (Interview with Vice Mayor for Migrants, Refugees and Municipal Decentralisation, Athens Municipality, 22/05/2018). This indicates that there

³² UNHCR notes that ‘a widely accepted definition of “livelihoods” is given by Chambers and Conway (Chambers and Conway, 1992): “A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets and activities required for a means of living”. Essentially, livelihoods refer to the means used to maintain and sustain life’. (UNHCR, 2006). Livelihood working groups for Syrians are currently running in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Greece.

³³ The NSRF (National Strategic Reference Framework) 2014-2020 constitutes the reference document for the programming of European Union Funds at national level for the 2014-2020 period.

is not necessarily agreement on the direction policies are taking but there is a willingness to find a middle ground to continue provision of services where possible. Discussions will often be informal before resulting in a formal agreement.

There are bilateral discussions between Mayors of different municipalities, often due to personal familiarity. This means that discussions and any potential results derive from an informal level rather than formal as there is no institutional framework for the relationship. Overall there appears to be good cooperation and consensus with the Municipalities that participate in the UNHCR accommodation programme (ESTIA) (e.g. Municipality of Athens, Thessaloniki, Levadia) as well as with Municipalities that have agreed to host accommodation centres in their area ran by NGOs and/or the IOM. From the civil society perspective, UNHCR has functioned as a coordinator particularly in Athens in the early days of the refugee “crisis” bringing together the government and the NGOs.

3.2.2 The Municipality of Thessaloniki

As with Athens, there was no reception system in Thessaloniki prior to 2015. Changes took place in 2016, following the closure of the Western Balkan route and the EU-Turkey Statement of March 2016. The changes primarily regard the setup of reception facilities in the City of Thessaloniki (as well as across the County) resulting in a reception and accommodation system gradually in place.

The shift from camps to accommodation structures was largely due to UNHCR’s policy of urbanisation, (interview with representative of an international organization, 20/8/2018 Thessaloniki). UNHCR was instrumental in both encouraging and facilitating the transition from camps to urban centres for asylum seekers. As the urban population of asylum seekers increased in the City of Thessaloniki, service-provision became a critical issue. The Municipality of Thessaloniki offered as a reception facility the Shelter for Refugee Families & Social Housing for Asylum seeking Youth (‘Filoxeneio’), which initially functioned as a shelter for asylum seekers with family.

The Municipality of Thessaloniki formed the Refugee Assistance Collaboration Thessaloniki (REACT) program, which constitutes an innovative humanitarian project for the reception of asylum seekers and refugees. The program offers temporary accommodation places in private apartments. The Municipality of Thessaloniki designed and implements the program which in turn positively influenced other Municipalities to undertake similar partnerships with UNHCR. In the Municipality of Thessaloniki alone, thirty (30) people work for REACT as administration, social workers, lawyers, interpreters, persons responsible for welcoming and accompanying the beneficiaries. REACT is now in its second year, in partnership with UNHCR and funded by the Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid. It constitutes part of the ESTIA program which is the UNHCR-DG ECHO program for accommodation where Municipalities across Greece participate.

Partners in REACT are the Municipality (coordinator), the Association for Social Support of Youth (ARSIS), Programs for Development of Social Support & Medical Cooperation (PRAKSIS), The young men’s Christian association of Thessaloniki, the Municipalities of Neapoli-Skyies, Kalamaria and Anatoliki S.A., the Region of Central Macedonia, and the Shelter for Refugee Families & Social Housing for Asylum seeking Youth (Filoxeneio).

The Municipalities are responsible for organising accommodation places in private apartments³⁴ and covering the utility costs. Different NGOs offer different services. ARSIS provides psycho-social support and interpretation services. PRAKSIS offers medical services while the Young Men's Association of Thessaloniki organizes creative activities. Filoxenio shelters vulnerable asylum seekers (mainly families). Additional cooperation exists with the Hellenic League for Human Rights and the Greek Council for Refugees that offer legal services and assistance to the beneficiaries.

REACT is designed to offer holistic service to its beneficiaries. Beyond accommodation it also offers various social and legal support and protection services to the beneficiaries, part of the broader framework of reception. The Municipality of Thessaloniki remains responsible as project coordinator of REACT however all partners participate in the decision-making process along with UNHCR. Migrant groups also indirectly participate in the decision-making process of REACT, through their role in the Migrant Integration Council. An informal consultation forum for reception issues has been set up. All actors that operate in the geographical region of Thessaloniki and are involved in reception, are invited to participate. Meetings, workshops, informal consultations, daily personal communications as well as meetings with focal points take place regularly with the purpose of coordinating reception activities but also taking decisions regarding the program. Thus, a mixed blend of formal and informal relations shape the decision-making process.

REACT has also facilitated further collaboration with civil society that contributes, usually as implementing partners, in the service provision. This serves as one more example of initiatives where the Municipality, civil society and international organisations come together to fill in the lacuna left from the authorities. In general, 'the management of reception has been conveniently transferred from the State to the NGOs and UNHCR. However, it is the State that should be managing reception' (interview, interview with NGO representatives, 17/08/2018 Thessaloniki).

All stakeholders acknowledged the Ministry for Migration has exhibited a willingness to collaborate with Municipalities and NGOs. Informal consultations take place as well as working meetings. The Ministry of Migration Policy has established a working group that meets every two months with stakeholders from the City of Thessaloniki for various issues including legal protection, education, health and sanitation etc of asylum seekers in the reception system. There are also regular high-ranking level meetings with the Ministry of Migration Policy and the Municipality of Thessaloniki. Nonetheless, these are informal consultations and as a representative from the Municipality noted, every time the Municipalities undertake an initiative on migration, they do so beyond the limits of their mandate.

The **Region of Central Macedonia** participates as a program partner in the REACT program. Regions, similarly, to Municipalities have no competency in the reception field and there is no legal framework for their involvement in the decision-making process on reception. Nonetheless, the Region of Central Macedonia has been active since 2015 in migration issues. This was largely a by-product of emergency unfolding at Idomeni. When the western Balkan route began closing, 60% of the population of refugees and asylum seekers were in 20% of the Greek territory (i.e in Central Macedonia). The Ministry of Labour, Social Solidarity and Social Security asked 'in deviation from the normal procedure to the Region of Central Macedonia to assist and send to Idomeni any available tents (interview with representative from the Region of Central Macedonia, 22/08/2018,

³⁴ Until August 8th, 2018, 1658 persons have benefited from REACT and 830 accommodation places have been established.

Thessaloniki). 2200 tents were sent, leaving the Region with 220 tents in case of an emergency such as an earthquake or fire.

Greek law prohibits any kind of civil activity in a zone of 1,200 meters from the border line and no State Service can be present near border zones aside from the military and border authorities. As the health situation deteriorated rapidly at Idomeni posing a danger to public health, the Region of Central Macedonia was unable to intervene and sought assistance from the Public Prosecutor, who in turn authorised the Hellenic Centre for Disease Control & Prevention (KEELPNO) to deploy at Idomeni.

What is the role of the Region of Central Macedonia, but regional authorities also broadly as regards reception? It is up to the Regions to propose recommendations to the Ministry for Migration (or any relevant ministry) and it is in the Ministry's discretion to embrace and implement these recommendations³⁵. Nonetheless, the Regions, perhaps more than the Municipalities, are constrained in their role. There are specific funds that can be used for migration-related issues and there has been no increase in funding to match the increase in needs. This again links to the absence of competencies, since without an appropriate legal framework the Regions cannot demand an increase in funds for activities it should not be undertaking. As such, any involvement stretches the limits of the law and depends, as with the Municipalities, largely on the discretion and personal willingness of the Governors.

The Region of Central Macedonia, one of the few Regions involved in reception, has asked for concrete competencies as regards the governance of reception, and the Ministry appears to be positive in that regard. This was also highlighted by other stakeholders who explained that the local authorities have asked for a legal framework that will enable them to participate in the decision-making processes and the Ministry Migration Policy is in favour of such a step. However, there has been no progress on this, partly due to the continuous changes in the leadership of Ministry as well as the General Secretariats ((interview representative from the Region of Central Macedonia, 22/08/2018, Thessaloniki) but also partly due to the hesitancy to give competences outside the Ministry to public authorities.

4. Policy Outcomes. Mechanisms of Convergence and Divergence in Policy Implementation

The last decade saw the emergence of a national reception system in Greece. This is a radical break from the past, overwhelmingly the result of the *M.S.S. vs Greece and Belgium* European Court of Human Rights decision, pressures from the European Commission as well as severe criticism by NGOs and UNHCR over the period 2000-2010. The changes in reception and the semblance of a reception system are also a product of emergency that allowed for rapid funding release from the European Commission.

4.1 Conditions of Access to Services and Quality of Services

The reception system that emerged post 2011 sought to establish similar modes of function, conditions of access to services as well as quality of services. However, this has not been achieved fully and this was highlighted by all stakeholders as well as the literature review (see AIDA 2017, RESPOND 2018).

³⁵ For example, the Region of Central Macedonia has asked that those who arrive from the areas of Tiger and Euphrates not to be accommodated in marshy areas to prevent an outbreak of malaria disease.

The system is characterized by high divergence in practice but convergence, in comparison to the past, in terms of who is responsible for reception, for the decisions and for the procedures across the country.

Homogeneity should derive from the relatively centralized decision-making structure and processes. However, even in this case, it is difficult to speak of an absolute convergence. For example, prior to 2015 the Reception and Identification Service (former First Reception Service prior to 2015) was responsible for offering reception services across the country, as was the Ministry of Labour, Social Insurance and Social Solidarity through the NCSS. Neither followed common criteria and both functioned independently. Post 2015, reception is the Ministry for Migration domain, but reception services are offered by multiple and different implementing partners (NGOs), which maintains the divergence in terms of access, quality and services on offer.

Considering that for reception only one authority is now responsible, the Ministry of Migration Policy along with the Reception and Identification Service, a level of homogenization exists. This has enabled also the adoption of procedures and clarified which public authorities have what responsibilities. The formal and informal working groups set up by NGOs, UNHCR and the Ministry for Migration across the country seem to strive for a level of convergence. Bringing together the actors involved in reception, the working groups seek to essentially achieve some level of harmonization and coordinate service provision.

On the other hand, divergence exists across the country in the way (if at all) reception is implemented.

There are three reasons for this divergence. First, the different modes of reception utilised in the mainland and on the islands of northern Aegean as a result of the EU-Turkey Statement. Secondly, there is no national plan for the reception of asylum seekers across the country. Thirdly, divergence is also a result of the ad hoc participation of Municipalities in reception through the ESTIA program.

The **EU-Turkey Statement of March 18th 2016**, resulted in a geographical division of Greece impacting both asylum (from access to how the asylum application is processed) as well as reception services.

The five islands of northern Aegean (Chios, Samos, Kos, Lesbos and Leros) have a blend of formal and informal reception. The Hotspots on the islands include the Reception and Identification Service and hold in detention-like conditions roughly 13000 people. The geographical limitation imposed on asylum seekers prevents them from leaving the islands until their asylum application is processed based on (in)admissibility and pending potential return to Turkey. Those waiting, are left largely stranded on islands lacking formal reception capacity or with limited formal reception options, i.e. apartments and/or organized reception camps.

The situation is aggravated by the **absence of a national plan** on reception. For an effective reception system, the inflow and outflow of asylum seekers needs to be considered, in other words there needs to be an outflow to allow for available spaces to be taken by the new arrivals. Due to the lack of alternative accommodation options as well as absence of integration programs, roughly 7000 recognised refugees are still in the reception system 'occupying the reception places allocated for asylum seekers' (interview, representative in international organization, 8/06/2018 Athens). This means there is zero capacity regarding available reception places for new arrivals. The result is alternative temporary solutions of low quality, such as tents. Within the hotspots for example, those who arrive today are housed in tents inappropriate for winter while past arrivals may reside in

containers with kitchens and private toilets- basic amenities new arrivals do not enjoy. This produces tensions among migrants but is also indicative of a fragmented and divergent system of reception, ill-equipped to address often the basic needs of those arriving in the country.

Beyond accommodation structures, absence of a national plan on reception is also evident also in the daily interaction asylum seekers are expected to have with the public administration. For example, asylum seekers in Greece are legally entitled to work while their application is pending. However, tax offices, bank services and social security services including acquisition of a social security number there are divergent practices not only between cities but also within cities. Some tax offices recognize camps as residence address and proceed with issuing the appropriate paper. Other tax offices do not and prevent asylum seekers from acquiring a tax number. Though the legal framework is the same, there is an absence of standards and monitoring mechanism on how the law is implemented.

Divergence exists also between the islands and the mainland, a product of the **ESTIA program** of accommodation.

ESTIA is voluntary and as was discussed above, not nation-wide nor in fact across most Municipalities. This means that different quality of services is offered through the program and in different areas of the mainland. Thus, it becomes extremely difficult to speak to the quality and access to services, since this varies depending on the region/area and who is responsible for offering service provision. There are many service providers, mainly from the NGO community and a deficit in information of who does what, and where. This, in turn proves often confusing for the asylum seekers that are unaware where to turn regarding specific services. The Athens Municipality addressed this through the creation of ACCSMR however the platform is only applicable to the Athens area.

4.2 Monitoring

Although the EU Directive on reception requires a monitoring mechanism, there is no official system at present. In fact, stakeholders noted that there appears to be little monitoring as regards the functioning of the reception system at a national level. There is financial monitoring, a result of the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) financial reporting system. Similarly, DG ECHO oversees and monitors the distribution of the emergency humanitarian assistance, as does the European Commission.

The ESTIA program has its own regulative framework that is designed and implemented by UNCHR and its partners, without the involvement of the Ministry. There are guidelines and standard operating procedures for the functioning of the program and strict monitoring to ensure a homogenized quality of reception services provided by the program. They are adopted by all implementing partners to the ESTIA program, including NGOs and Municipalities.

IOM undertakes monitoring and application of common standards across the accommodation facilities (from camps to apartments) it operates, and equally oversees the application of service provisions by its implementing partners. REACT also, is monitored partly through the funding sources but also the relevant units of the Municipality of Thessaloniki. Thus, it becomes clear that where there is a legal framework in place- even in the form of partnerships and Memorandum of cooperation- monitoring does take place. In this process however, the Greek state remains absent.

The National Centre for Social Solidarity utilizes working groups where along with NGOs and UNICEF seek to coordinate action, monitor implementation and ameliorate services provision. In 2019 the NCSS plans to create a special Unit responsible for the evaluation of the quality of the services provided to unaccompanied minors. This would increase the NCSS's competence in the field and allow for services to improve and support those who provide reception services to unaccompanied minors.

The only centralized monitoring we have identified, takes place from the Reception and Identification Service in the facilities (hotspots mainly) it oversees. However, reports of NGOs speak of extremely low standards of reception services offered, often resembling a broken-down system. This raises questions as to what type of monitoring takes place and its effectiveness.

Overall, we should note that when speaking about reception in Greece, the timeframe is that of the last decade since prior to 2010 there was no reception capacity, aside from the few places allocated by the NCSS. Between 2010 and 2013 the framework for reception emerges, in parallel with the broader reforms of the asylum system, yet there is significant divergence between the law and its application. In practice, Greece continues to lack reception capacity and the gap is revealed in 2015 amidst the arrival of thousands in the space of few months. It is a gap that localities, civil society and international organisations have sought to fill. However, this has resulted in a paradox. On the one hand reception (and integration to a large extent) relies on the will and means of non-state-actors and municipal authorities. On the other hand, decisions are made by the Ministry for Migration without the obligation to consult those who will be called to implement the policies designed. It is an unsustainable relationship and as the electorate period in Greece draws near, the question for most working in the field of reception is what will happen in the future, not only for new arrivals but also for those who need to shift from being beneficiaries of first reception to being beneficiaries of integration services.

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Appendix 1. List of official documents

Government Gazette (2011) Issue No. B' 2016, 9 September 2011. Available in Greek at <https://www.e-pronoia.gr/sites/default/files/file23.pdf>

Keywords: National Centre for Social Solidarity, accommodation requests

Law 3907/2011. Available at <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4da6ee7e2.html>

Keywords: Asylum Service, First Reception Service, transposition of Directive 2008/115/EC, reform

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Keyword: validation of L4048/2012 on First Reception Centres and Detention Centres

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Keywords: restructuring of Police, detention

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Keywords: Ministry of Defence assistance in hotspots, organisation of hotspots

Law 4375/2016. Available at <https://www.refworld.org/docid/573ad4cb4.html>

Keywords: operation of the Asylum Service, the Appeals Authority, the Reception and Identification Service, the establishment of the General Secretariat for Reception, the transposition into Greek legislation of the provisions of Directive 2013/32/EC

Law 4540/2018. Available in Greek at <https://www.e-nomothesia.gr/kat-allodapoi/prosphuges-politiko-asulo/nomos-4540-2018-phek-91a-22-5-2018.html>

Keywords: operation of the Asylum Service, transposition in Greek legislation of the Directive 2013/33/EC on reception of applicants for international protection

Law 4554/2018. Available in Greece at <https://www.e-forologia.gr/lawbank/document.aspx?digest=B25AD742DB55E490.1D031AEA53&version=2018/07/18>

Keywords: guardianship, organizational structure of guardianship, funding sources

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Keyword: creation of the Ministry of Migration Policy, mandate and structure

Presidential Decree 220/2007. Available in Greek at <https://www.e-nomothesia.gr/inner.php/kat-allodapoi/prosphuges-politiko-asulo/pd-220-2007.html?print=1>

Keyword: transposition of Directive 2003/9/EC on minimum standards of reception (partially annulled and replaced by Law 4554/2018)

Appendix 2. List of interviews

1. Interview with Director of Social Protection, National Centre for Social Solidarity, 06/06/201, Athens
2. Interview with International Organisation representative, 08/06/2018, Athens.
3. Interview with International Organisation representative, 10/6/2018, Athens.
4. Interview with Local Coordinator for Refugee Shelter for Families (ARSIS), 02/11/2018, Athens.
5. interview with NGO representative, 15/06/2018, Athens
6. Interview with Head of Department, Municipality of Athens, 15/06/2018, Athens.
7. Interview with Vice-Mayor for Migrants, Refugees and Municipal Decentralisation, Municipality of Athens, 22/05/2018, Athens.
8. Interview with Senior representative of the Municipality of Athens, 31/05/2018, Athens.
9. Interview with former Head of Communication, international and European Cooperation First Reception Service, 07/06/2018, Athens.
10. Interview with Deputy Governor, Region of Central Macedonia, 22/08/2018, Thessaloniki.
11. Interview with Project Coordinator (REACT Program), Municipality of Thessaloniki, 08/08/2018, Thessaloniki.
12. Interview with International Organisation representative, 20/08/2018, Thessaloniki.
13. Interview with Social work and Lawyer of the Greek Council for Refugees, 17/08/2018, Thessaloniki.
14. Interview with Prof. Andreas Takis, Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki, 20/06/2018, via Skype.
15. Interview with senior representative of NGO, 06/06/2018, via skype (island location).



The research project CEASEVAL (“Evaluation of the Common European Asylum System under Pressure and Recommendations for Further Development”) is an interdisciplinary research project led by the Institute for European studies at Chemnitz University of Technology (TU Chemnitz), funded by the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation program under grant agreement No 770037.) It brings together 14 partners from European countries aiming to carry out a comprehensive evaluation of the CEAS in terms of its framework and practice and to elaborate new policies by constructing different alternatives of implementing a common European asylum system. On this basis, CEASEVAL will determine which kind of harmonisation (legislative, implementation, etc.) and solidarity is possible and necessary.