Reception System, its Capabilities and the Social Situation of Asylum Applicants in Greece

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1. Short Historical Overview of the Development of Reception Facilities

Greece is located at the crossroads between Asia, Africa and Europe. However, for a long period of time Greece had been a rather homogeneous country with a very low inflow of economic migrants, or asylum seekers and refugees. The largest waves of refugees until the last quarter of the 20th century were ethnic Greeks from Asia Minor, the Balkans, or Northern Africa. Nevertheless, since the transition to democracy in 1974, Greece has been enjoying its longest period of peaceful and stable political condition. It was in the 1980s and mostly in the 1990s that aliens started coming to Greece to seek asylum and refuge from the conditions in their own countries. In 1980s the majority of asylum seekers came from Turkey, Poland, Iran, Ethiopia and various Middle Eastern countries. Currently, the vast majority of asylum seekers originate from Iraq and Afghanistan due to the existing political developments in these countries.

A migrant-producing country until three decades ago, Greece has currently become a country of reception. Considerable numbers of refugees and asylum seekers keep arriving in Greece, although they do not always stay. Until the early 1990s Greece was mainly a transit country for refugees who wished and could be resettled mainly to the US, Canada or Australia.

Since the early 1990s, refugee migrations have become particularly complex, compared with the 1950-1990 decades. This different and more complex character could be attributed to the rapid social and political changes especially in Eastern Europe and the new international technological and economic facts of life, which have contributed to much more frequent and regular cross-border movements of populations and individuals. States, such as Greece, which had not so far developed an integrated legal, infra-structural and technical framework for the protection of refugees, necessarily had to come to grips with these new realities. Thus the Greek State, within the context of its obligations, which stem from international and Community law, proceeded to the enactment of a modern legal framework for the protection of refugees and asylum-seekers. The main features of such a modernisation are the following: the transfer of competence regarding asylum centres from the Ministry of Public Order to the Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity, the freedom of movement of refugees and asylum seekers, the issue of work permits for asylum seekers, accelerated asylum procedures, establishment of reception centres, provision
of information about Greek asylum procedure, legal aid and interpretation to asylum seekers.

Currently, asylum seekers enter Greece in many ways. Few arrive to airports and seaports, but most of them, cross the borders illegally along with economic immigrants. They either cross the Evros River that separates Greece from Turkey, or use small boats to reach one of the many Greek islands all over the Aegean. Upon their arrival are expected to submit their application for asylum to the border authorities.

In terms of the Greek reception system, the largest and oldest reception centre in Greece is the one located at Lavrio, with a capacity to accommodate up to 300-350 persons. Since 1999 (PD 266/1999), Lavrio has been subject in administrative terms to the Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity. Up until then, Lavrio centre was supervised by the Ministry of Public Order. The law on aliens - 1975/1991 (Article 24, para.2) - provided for the setting up of other reception centres. Since the end of 1990s various NGOs became very active in the domain of reception system. The state transferred the daily management of these centres to NGOs while it kept the general supervision, as well as the financing, or co-financing of these centres within its sphere of authority. Moreover, through the organisation of seminars the NGOs train a large part of those specialised personnel (social workers, doctors, lawyers, interpreters, volunteers, administrative staff, psychologists, etc.), working on refugee protection, intending to improve the quality of the reception services provided to asylum seekers and refugees. These seminars cover crucial issues, such as the definition of refugee status, the procedure of application for asylum, protection against human trafficking, protection of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers, function of reception centres, as well as ethics.

Last, as pointed out in the report, there are still serious problems regarding the overall asylum system, such as the long duration of the procedure of application for asylum, which has a direct impact on the functioning and efficiency of the reception system.
2. Asylum Application Procedures and Legal Framework

2.1 Asylum Application Procedures

Greece is a signatory party to the Geneva Convention of 1951 and New York Protocol of 1967. The current asylum legislation provides that ‘an alien who is in any way on Greek territory shall be recognised as a refugee and shall be granted asylum if the conditions of Article 1A of the Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugee are fulfilled’. The application for asylum can be made orally or in writing, but in person, either at the frontier checkpoints or to any other public authority (Art.1, para.1, PD 61/99). The dependent members of the applicant’s family who are with him/her are also included in the application (Art.1, paras. 1&3, PD 61/99). The asylum seeker is given a booklet in a language, which he/she understands, which includes information on the procedure, the rights of the applicants, and the organisations assisting refugees. If such a booklet is not available, or does not exist in a language which the applicant understands, or if the applicant is illiterate, then he/she is briefed orally with the assistance of an interpreter. Before the interview, any applicant who wishes is given a reasonable time in which to prepare and to consult a lawyer. Asylum seekers should also be provided with an interpreter during the interview with the Ministry of Public Order (MPO) officer, police director or other competent officer.

If an asylum seeker arrives at a port or an airport without the proper documents to enter the territory and files an application for asylum, the application should be considered on the same day. All applications filed at ports and airports are examined within the accelerated procedure (Art.4, PD 61/99). Applications filed within the country can also be channelled through the accelerated procedure if, after the first interview, the interviewer is of the opinion that the claim is ‘manifestly unfounded’ (Art.2, para.2, Law 2452/96). The submission of the case to the Ministry of Public Order should be made within ten days (Art.2, para.9, PD 61/99).

Each case is examined on an individual basis and the asylum seeker must not be expelled before a decision is made on whether or not the case is ‘manifestly unfounded’. An application can be declared as ‘manifestly unfounded’, inter alia, due to following reasons: i) the reason for the application does not fall within 1951 Convention; ii) the asylum seeker has used false identity documents, given false information, or is considered to have ‘abused’ the procedure in other ways; iii) the asylum seeker comes from a ‘safe country of origin’.
If the application is rejected, the applicant has the right to lodge an appeal to the Secretary General of the MPO. This appeal must be lodged within ten days from delivery of the initial negative decision (Art.4, para.4, PD 61/99). The Secretary General’s decision is based on the advice of an appeals board consisting of officials from the MPO, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a representative of the Athens Bar Association and a representative of UNHCR. However, the appeals board is a consultative body, its recommendations thus do not have any binding effect. Also, this is the same committee as for appeals in the regular procedure. The decision on the appeal must be delivered within 30 days (Art. 4, para.5, PD 61/99). The appeal has suspensive effect.

An application for asylum under the regular process can be lodged with any public authority in Greece. There is no time limit for filing an application. After an initial interview, the authority examining the asylum claim submits the application, with supporting documents and a report, to its supervisory Police Directorate or Aliens Sub-Directorate. The supervisory body gives its opinion on the proposals made by the interviewing officer and on whether to transfer the responsibility to examine the application to another EU Member State under the Dublin Convention. It then submits the application to the competent Directorate of the MPO.

The Secretary-General of the MPO makes the decision on the application, following relevant recommendations made by the Division of State Security of the MPO. Asylum applications are to be examined within three months following their submission.

If the application is rejected, the decision is announced to the applicant orally, in a language he/she understands. The applicant is informed in good time by the committee of the place and date of examination of the appeal and has the right to attend in person, with or without a lawyer, in order to argue the case with the assistance of an interpreter, if necessary. The decision contains a reasoned justification for the rejection and explicitly mentions the time limit of 30 days for the right to file an appeal (Art.3, para.3, first sentence, PD 61/99). There is a one level right to appeal to the locally competent Police authority, which forwards the case to the Minister of Public Order. The decision should be made within 90 days and is based on the advice of the appeals board (Art.3, para.5, PD 61/99). The appeal has suspensive effect (Art.3, paras.3-4, PD 61/99). Moreover, the asylum applicant is still
considered a potential refugee and keeps the rights provided by law for asylum seekers. This status remains until a final decision is issued.

If an asylum seeker is recognised as a refugee, he/she is given a copy of the decision and a refugee identity card. On the basis of this card, the refugee is provided, free of charge, with a residence permit valid for five years. This permit is renewable.

An asylum seeker who is not granted refugee status can be granted a temporary residence card on humanitarian grounds (Skordas & Sitaropoulos: 2004, 35-38). The Minister of Public Order grants the residence card on humanitarian grounds and there is no right to appeal a refusal. The card is valid for one year. To renew the permit the person must, at least 15 days before the expiration of the card, submit an application to the locally competent police authority. The General Secretary of the MPO decides on such applications (Art.25, para.4, Law 1975/1991 & Art. 8, PD 61/99).

Asylum applicants have the right to be accommodated to any of the centres only when they hold the so-called pink card, which is issued after the interview. The possession of the pink card ascribes all the rights and duties ascribed to a Greek national, the right to work and the right to get free medical care by the National Health System. Once the applicant gets his/her pink card, then he/she can apply for the issue of a work permit. The documents he/she needs to produce are the following: the pink card, a chest x-ray and a health certificate. Work permit is then issued within approximately 10 days.

In practice in recent years the duration of the above-mentioned procedural stages, especially in Athens with the main bulk of asylum applications, is much longer than the one specified by legislation. To a great extent this is due to the large increase in the number of first instance asylum applicants (table 1). It is worth noting that a significant proportion of asylum seekers is nationals of certain states where internal conflicts have forced people to flee the country (table 2). Such a dramatic increase combined with the shortage of specialised personnel on asylum issues (like interviewers, interpreters) have obviously caused inevitable management problems to the responsible authorities and delayed the examination procedure. In this context, based on the estimates of the Ministry of Public Order, the UNHCR in Greece reports that approximately 50,000 persons have been given in-service notes for a later date of interview awaiting to become formally registered as asylum seekers.

From the time the applicants submit their application until the interview and the issue of the pink card, they hold the so-called ‘in-service’ notes on which the date of the
interview is registered. This note is the only legal document the applicant possesses but which does not ascribe him/her basic social rights, such as the right to work and the right to medical care. This note is usually renewed many times. When the applicant proceeds to the competent authority for his/her interview is told that this is deferred to three months later, which in its turn can be postponed once more, and so on. Consequently, such a delay means that in practice the applicants could stay for a long period of time with no formal documents exposed to many risks, stemming from the lack of state protection. Eventually these persons are prompted to seek employment in the informal labour market. Also, with the help of their friends and relatives who have been already settled, they make their own accommodation arrangements prior to the issue of the pink card. As a result when they finally receive the pink card, many of them are reluctant to enter a reception facility. Hence while the number of asylum seekers is much higher than the capacity of the reception system, there are vacant places at reception centres.

The time that elapses from the issue of the pink card until the final decision on an asylum application, due to the high number of applications as well as to administrative deficiencies, is also rather longer than that provided by law. Incidentally, a remarkable percentage of asylum applicants, estimated in 2004 at 14.2 percent, can not be traced when their application is examined. This partly indicates that many asylum seekers consider Greece as a transit country towards their final destination.

2.2 Legal Framework of Reception Conditions
The Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity is responsible for establishing and organising temporary reception for asylum seekers after the issue of the pink card. The asylum applicant is bound to stay at the address he/she declares at the police authorities or at a place referred to by the latter. According to this provision, police authorities usually designate a place of accommodation (one of the reception centres) after consultation and co-ordination with the Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity. If there is no such consultation or when there is no free place, the asylum applicants just declare the address of a friend or even the address of a non-governmental

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1 This problem has been pointed out in the following report: Hellenic Republic-National Commission for Human Rights (June 2001), Proposals on the Promotion of a Modern and Effective Framework For
organisation. Therefore, the placement of an asylum seeker in a reception centre or any other accommodation facility is not obligatory but is based on the free choice of the applicants. In the case when the applicants do not have a place to stay, then the authorities are obliged to accommodate them in any of the reception centres. However at both cases if the applicant can not be traced by the authorities in either of the addresses he/she has been placed or he/she has chosen to stay, then his/her application is automatically discontinued.\(^2\)

The order of priority according to which the asylum applicants would be accommodated in the reception centre of Lavrio is the following: 1. asylum applicants whose cases are examined under the regular procedure, 2. asylum applicants whose cases are examined under the accelerated procedure, 3. the elderly, 4. single-headed families, 5. large families, 6. families with minor children (Tsovili & Voutira: 2004, 13-14). Asylum seekers who are accommodated in Lavrio reception centre should leave within 30 days from the notification of a decision recognising them as Convention refugees.

The specific categories among those who apply for asylum and who could be accepted in the institutions that accommodate Greek nationals are defined as follows: people with psychological problems, unaccompanied persons below the age of 15, and elderly or people with physical disabilities (Tsovili & Voutira: 2004,14). Last no financial contribution is provided to individual accommodation.

3. Organisation, Number and Capacities of Reception Facilities

3.1 Organisation of Reception Facilities

All reception and accommodation centres are supervised by the Greek state, the Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity in particular. A number of these are financed entirely through the state budget, while some other are co-financed by the state and the European Refugee Fund (ERF). The day-to-day management and operation of these centres, including food-supply to residents, has been transferred to NGOs. Therefore, the accommodation centres are centralised and, as mentioned above, no financial assistance has been provided for individual renting accommodation.

\(^2\) It is reactivated, if the applicant presents him/her self within three months and establishes that the absence was due to force majeure, according to art. 2, para. 8, Presidential Decree 61/99.

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the Protection of Refugees (Asylum) in Greece. In particular, the Commission calls for the elimination of the so-called ‘in-service’ notes, as well as the amendment of the legislation.
Regarding the cost of the reception centres, the information is as follows. In 2003 the State subsidised certain NGOs for the management of reception centres with the amount of 2113 ths Euros. In the same year the ERF\(^3\) gave 537 ths Euros for the same purpose. Thus the total cost amounts to 2650 ths Euros. The estimation of the average cost per person, per day for all centres is not easy, because there is no information regarding the exact stay of asylum seekers in each reception centre. However, we can estimate the average cost per person, per day for the Lavrio reception centre assuming that 300 persons were continuously residing there. Under this assumption, which is very close to reality (table 3), the average cost per person in 2004 was estimated at 11.12 Euros, while in 1998 it was 8.65 Euros.

It is reasonable to assume that the average cost per person at other reception centres is certainly higher than that of Lavrio centre, because vacant places are usually reported, especially in those centres located at remote areas. More specifically, the cost of the reception centre of Sperhiada in 2004 is estimated at 17.1 Euros per person/day, after considering the fact that the average stay in the centre is 6 months and that the number of residents was 111 person, according to the data provided by the Hellenic Red Cross which manages the centre (table 3). As far as the Kokkinopilos centre is concerned, the cost is estimated at 14.5 Euros in 2004, based on the assumption mentioned above regarding the average stay and the fact that the number of residents was 78 persons (table 3).

### 3.2 Number, Capacities and Distribution

It is difficult to estimate the exact total capacity of the Greek reception system, as some facilities have an *ad hoc* character. At times when the number of asylum applicants is a lot more than the available places at the centres, these people can be temporarily accommodated free of charge at hotels. Funding is provided through the state budget. According to officials of the Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity, this occurred in 2002 when the number of applicants hosted in hotels was nearly 3,000.

The total capacity of the reception centres, as presented in the following tables, is currently nearly 900 persons. In 2003 three reception centres-at Pikermi, Nea Makri and Pendeli- that existed in the wide Attica area, closed due to lack of funding.

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\(^3\) It is worth noting that while in principle ERF can finance up to 75 percent of the projects, in practice this percentage turns out drastically lower due to the eligibility criteria for various expenses.
### Capacities and Distribution of Reception Centres

#### Reception Centres Financed Entirely by the State

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Management</th>
<th>Capacity (in person)</th>
<th>Main Functions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lavrio (Eastern Attica)</td>
<td>Hellenic Red Cross</td>
<td>300-350</td>
<td>Reception and accommodation of general groups of asylum seekers according to specified order of priority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kokkinopilos (Prefecture of Larissa-near the city of Elassona)</td>
<td>Hellenic Red Cross</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>Reception and accommodation of single men asylum seekers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sperhiada (Prefecture of Fthiotida-near the city of Lamia)</td>
<td>Hellenic Red Cross</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>Provision of accommodation to single men and families of asylum seekers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anogia (Crete)</td>
<td>Hellenic Youth Foundation</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Provision of accommodation to unaccompanied minor asylum seekers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iolaos (Athens)</td>
<td>Greek Council for Refugees</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Provision of specialised medical treatment for asylum seekers with mental and psychiatric disorders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary Accommodation</td>
<td>Greek Council for Refugees</td>
<td>Ad hoc</td>
<td>Provision of accommodation to hotels for asylum seekers transferred from other centres to Athens and large cities for specific reasons (e.g. medical treatment)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Reception Centres Co-financed by the State and the European Refugee Fund (ERF)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Management</th>
<th>Capacity (in person)</th>
<th>Main Functions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aspropyrgos (Western Attica)</td>
<td>Hellenic Institute of Solidarity</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Reception and accommodation of all asylum seekers except from separated children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thessaloniki</td>
<td>Social Solidarity</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Reception and accommodation of all asylum seekers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nefeli Programme</td>
<td>Social Work Foundation</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Provision of accommodation to single women, men and families in rented apartments in Western Athens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Support</td>
<td>Greek Council for Refugees</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Integration Programmes- Co-financed by the State and the European Refugee Fund (ERF)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Management</th>
<th>Main Functions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Functional Centre of Social Support and Integration of Refugees</td>
<td>Hellenic Red Cross</td>
<td>Provision of services and programmes of social support and integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EVA Programme</td>
<td>UNHCR-Greek State</td>
<td>Provision of language tuition, vocational training and health care to women refugees and immigrants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As a result, the total capacity of all the reception centres in Greece decreased by approximately 400 persons, whereas two years ago it was 1300 persons. It is worth noting that the Pikermi reception centre, with a capacity of 100 persons, when it closed down was hosting 40 persons who were transferred to other reception facilities. The respective numbers of Pendeli reception centre, which closed in April 2003, were 300 and 80 persons. Furthermore, Nea Makri reception centre with a capacity of 120 persons in 2002, a year before its closing, hosted 189 persons, while due to its expected closure in 2003, the number of residents declined to 150 persons. Given that the normal maximum stay in this centre was up to 6 months, it is clear that it was not consistently full. Up to date, it is not clear whether the state plans to set up new accommodation centres in the near future.

It is not easy to estimate the average stay of applicants in the centres. According to officials of the Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity, the average time of stay is around three months for single people and six months for families. The policy guideline of the Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity is to encourage asylum applicants to sustain themselves as soon as possible. However, as has been pointed out by NGOs’ representatives, there are cases of certain groups of applicants who stay in the centres for more than a year. Such estimates relate to the fact that in the majority of cases of asylum applicants, the waiting period until the delivery of the first administrative decision exceeds one year. In Attica, there are cases exceeding even two years.

Regarding the regional distribution of the centres, most of them are found at the outskirts of Athens, the wider Attica area in particular, (Aspropyrgos, Lavrio), some other in rural areas (Kokkinopilos, Sperhiada). What could be pointed out is that there are consistently vacant places in the reception centres of Sperhiada and Kokkinopilos. In this respect, while the capacity of Sperhiada is 150 persons, in 2004 only 111 persons were residing with an estimate average stay of 6 months. The corresponding numbers of Kokkinopilos is 120 and 78. On the other hand, currently in Athens area and other large cities there is not an effective shortage of accommodation places. This is mainly due to the long time that elapses between the asylum application and the issue of the pink card, during which eventually many asylum applicants have already made their own accommodation arrangements.
3.3 Problems and Strengths of the Reception System

It is reasonable to consider as strengths of the reception facilities the provision of systematic social, language, training and employment support to asylum seekers. A set of problems relates to the geographical remoteness of some of these centres. It is fairly reasonable that the majority of the applicants prefer to stay in the accommodation facilities of Athens rather than the remote centres of Sperhiada and Kokkinopilos, where job and training opportunities are fewer than those in Athens. Consequently, there is often an excess demand for accommodation at Athens area, whereas at the same time there are a lot of vacant places in remote centres, in rural areas.\(^4\) This geographical imbalance in the distribution of centres further exacerbated in 2003 when the three reception centres-mentioned earlier in the report- that existed just outside Athens closed down.

Furthermore, another serious problem is the financial sustenance of these centres. Most of the centres lack regular funds, fact that has a serious impact on both the quality and the number of services and facilities provided.

4.1 Social Situation in Accommodation Centres and Other Reception Facilities

Overall accommodation at the centres follows a general pattern: families are accommodated together in one room, single men and women are accommodated separately, while unaccompanied children are accommodated with other people of the same sex.

The sizes of rooms at Lavrio centre are as follows: rooms of 35 m\(^2\) for accommodating 6 persons and rooms of 25 - 30 m\(^2\) to accommodate 4 persons. ‘Nefeli’ Programme (managed by the Institute of Social Solidarity) offers accommodation at independent flats in two or three-storey buildings in suburbs of Western Athens.

Regarding recreational activities these are lacking at certain centres. In other cases, recreational activities include a common living room with a television and stereo, or even some space for sport activities.

General food supply for all has been organised. The programme of meals is organised with due respect to the residents’ special diet choice on religious and cultural grounds.

Also, meals at the centres of Kokkinopilos and Sperhiada are prepared by a co-

\(^4\) Interview with representatives of the Hellenic Red Cross.
operating catering service, whereas at Lavrio center meals are prepared by a cook. No financial contribution for food has been provided and there are no individual cooking possibilities.

4.2 Benefits of Asylum Applicants

In Greece, there are no legal provisions giving asylum seekers a general right to social assistance in the forms of means of subsistence. When a person is registered as an asylum seeker, he/she has however the right to seek and obtain work as well as the freedom of movement within the borders of Greece. Convention refugees with chronic disabilities can receive financial assistance from the Greek state, but these provisions are not available to asylum seekers or those with humanitarian status in a similar position.

The reason given for the apparent lack of social assistance is that the asylum seekers should be on an equal footing with the native Greek population for whom no such assistance is available unless they are disabled or elderly. The reception of asylum seekers relies to a large extent on the NGOs to provide social assistance. The activities of the NGOs are co-financed by the state.

At some reception centres there is some payment in kind, with the provision of food, clothes and shoes, personal hygiene products, etc. Also, in the context of ‘Nefeli’ project, a monthly bus ticket is given to all residents as an incentive to move around the city and seek employment. At Anogia centre for unaccompanied minor asylum seekers, a small monthly allowance is given for their personal expenses, mostly spent by the children to contact members of their family through phone calls.

4.3 Provision of Services

Children of foreign nationals can be registered in public schools even if they or their parents do not have valid identity documents or a residence permit in Greece. Many asylum seekers in the early stages of the asylum procedure (i.e. before they receive the ‘pink card’) register their children under this provision. Depending on their age, the children of asylum seekers are required by ministerial decision to undergo compulsory education, which includes 6 years of primary and the first three years of secondary education.

Three ‘intercultural centres’ of the Greek Council for Refugees in Athens and education centres run by the Athens Voluntary Work and by Social Work Foundation
offer free language classes for refugee and asylum seeker children. These centres may also provide social and psychological counselling. Also at the Lavrio Centre, the applicants are offered social support, educational programmes including Greek language tuition, mother tongue tuition for children (Kurdish and Farsi), English language tuition for children and adults, legal assistance and counselling. Furthermore, in selected schools in areas of Athens and Thessaloniki with a high percentage of foreign student intake, the Centre for Intercultural Education in Athens University, as well as Aristotelio University in Thessaloniki run special tuition courses for all foreign children, funded by the Ministry of Education. Language courses are also offered as part of vocational training programmes.

Moreover, Greek Council for Refugees has established the centre ‘Pyksida’ (‘Compass’) which organises various programmes of integration of asylum applicants and refugees into the local society. Also, the Hellenic Red Cross has established the Multi-Functional Centre of Social Support and Integration of Refugees in Academia Platonos, Athens. The centre offers services and programmes of social support and social integration to refugees, regardless of nationality and residence.

Since December 2002, a programme funded by the European Social Fund called ‘New Beginning’ has started to be implemented. The aim of the programme is to provide asylum seekers and refugees with Greek language tuition and various training seminars to facilitate their integration into the labour market and social life. The Greek Council for Refugees has participated in the implementation of this programme offering logistic, social and legal support to the participants.

In terms of medical care if the asylum seeker holds the pink card he/she can consult a local General Practitioner working within the National Health System or a local health clinic on an equal footing with Greek nationals. In principle, upon their arrival and following medical tests, the prospective refugees are issued a health certificate stating that they do not suffer from any contagious disease. There are no specific regulations in Greece to ensure access to the National Health System. However, when an asylum seeker, refugee or person holding residence permit for humanitarian reasons visits a doctor or a hospital, he/she is usually accompanied by a representative of one of the major NGOs who may act as interpreter and explain to the asylum seeker what is going to happen and why. This is common practice for NGOs in Greece and is funded by the state as an integral part of NGOs programmes.
In terms of health and medical care provided by the reception centres, at some of these centres a nurse and a doctor are often available. For cases they cannot deal with, the nurse or the doctor escorts the person to the local Health Centre or a public Hospital. A number of reception centres run health and medical care programmes, as well as programmes of preventive medicine on a regular basis by specialised scientific personnel. In some cases, the asylum applicants are transferred to local medical centre or public hospital in Athens. In the case of asylum applicants who face psychological or psychiatric problems at the first stages, help is provided by the specialised social workers of the Hellenic Red Cross. If there is a need for further specialised treatment, these cases are referred to specialised psychiatric departments and programmes (e.g. at the Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims and ‘Iolaos’ hostel run by the Greek Council for Refugees).

Regarding people with special needs, such as unaccompanied minors in particular, a noteworthy reception centre for unaccompanied minor asylum seekers has been operating at Anogia, in Crete since January 2001. This centre is managed and staffed by the Hellenic Youth Foundation, a public organisation under the auspices of the Ministry of Education. Minors are given the opportunity to learn Greek and English and also to gain vocational training.

Childcare centres accept the children of asylum seekers and refugees on the same basis as Greek nationals. As the children of asylum seekers and refugees are considered to be a vulnerable population group, they are usually given priority by the social services although they are not able to get financial assistance with childcare fees. Hellenic Red Cross provides a day centre for children. In addition, Lavrio reception centre offers medical care and childcare education. In terms of female asylum seekers, there are no specific provisions apart from those concerning the adequate conduct of the interview (female personnel and/or interpreter, confidentiality, etc.). In certain cases (for instance, pregnant women) they can be considered as vulnerable cases and have their cases examined as a priority.

Moreover, persons who claim to be torture victims are referred to a specialist who will compile a report on the indications of torture. Torture victims are offered rehabilitation at the Medical Rehabilitation Centre for Victims of Torture. The mentally ill asylum seekers are referred for diagnosis and treatment to Mental Health Institutions. Disabled asylum seekers are referred to the Medical Rehabilitation Centre for the Disabled. Parallel to the state offer, the Greek Council for Refugees
runs a programme for vulnerable asylum seekers to accommodate them in hostels and offer support in kind (clothes, food).

4.4 Duties
Each reception centre has its own internal regulations, which must be followed by residents. Even though these regulations vary by centre, some common rules include the obligation of residents to keep their rooms and common areas of the centre tidy and clean, as well as closely co-operate with the staff and their co-residents.
Table 1

First instance asylum applications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Absolute numbers</th>
<th>Index (1998=1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>2953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ministry of Public Order

Table 2

Individual asylum applications and refugee status determination in 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Pending appl. begin year</th>
<th>Applied during year</th>
<th>Decisions during year</th>
<th>Pending applications end-year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>Recognised</td>
<td>Otherwise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Conv./ Mandate</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rejected</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRQ</td>
<td>1.808</td>
<td>936</td>
<td>785</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFG</td>
<td>440</td>
<td>382</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIG</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAK</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRN</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BGD</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MYA</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>334</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOM</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PALESTINIAN</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.808</td>
<td>1.290</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5.231</td>
<td>4.469</td>
<td>3.722</td>
<td>622</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: UNHCR

Table 3

Cost of Reception Centres in 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Centre</th>
<th>Total Functional Cost (Euros)</th>
<th>Day Functional Cost (Euros)</th>
<th>Day Functional Cost/Person</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lavrio Centre</td>
<td>1.218.000,00</td>
<td>3.336,99</td>
<td>11.12 Euros (for 300 residents)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sperhiada Centre</td>
<td>341.300,00</td>
<td>935.07</td>
<td>17.1 Euros (Based on the assumption that the average stay is 6 months and given that the number of residents was 111 persons)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KokkinoPilos Centre</td>
<td>203.100,00</td>
<td>556.44</td>
<td>14.5 Euros (Based on the above assumption and given that the number of residents was 78 persons)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity & Hellenic Red Cross
### List of Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authority or NGO</th>
<th>Persons interviewed</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Date of interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity</td>
<td>I.Harissopoulou, A.Gini</td>
<td>Head of Awareness and Social Solidarity Dept. Administrator</td>
<td>2 February 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek Council for Refugees</td>
<td>P.Papadimitriou, A.Klonari</td>
<td>Legal advisor, Social worker</td>
<td>10 February 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hellenic Red Cross</td>
<td>Papadopoulou, Papastergiou</td>
<td>Director of welfare, Accountant</td>
<td>16 February 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>M. Stavropoulou, A. Giannakaki</td>
<td>Director, Dept of Protection</td>
<td>17 February 2005</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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