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**HELLENIC REPUBLIC**

Contribution to the Report by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

on the “Human Rights of migrants”

Greece is committed to implementing a migration policy complying with principles and obligations under International and European Union Law, including all Human Rights Treaties to which the country has ratified. This document provides a brief overview of recent developments in the various areas of migration management.

1. **International Protection**

An important priority for Greece has been the establishment of a fair, efficient, and resilient asylum system that adheres to European Union and international obligations and principles, while being able to withstand crises and prevent abuses. Over the past two years, there has been a significant reduction in the number of pending asylum cases, also known as the "backlog." Additionally, due to institutional developments and legislative amendments, asylum seekers arriving in Greece now receive the first decision on their application as quickly as possible, typically within around 29 days from the submission of the application.

In 2022, Greece received 37,342 applications for international protection. During the same year, decisions granting refugee status were issued for 19,386 applicants, and 908 individuals were granted subsidiary protection (at both the first and second degree of decision-making). In the first three months of 2023, Greece received 10,111 asylum applications. Within the same period, decisions granting refugee status were made for 3,535 applicants, and 209 individuals were granted subsidiary protection (at the first and second degree of decision-making).

Furthermore, Greece has implemented a system of temporary protection for individuals fleeing Ukraine. Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine and the activation of the European Directive for Temporary Protection (2001/55), Greece has granted temporary protection residence permits to 22,704 individuals as of March 31, 2023. The Ministry of Migration and Asylum (MMA) offers an online pre-registration system on its website to facilitate the application process. The MMA has also taken targeted steps and actions to inform and assist displaced persons from Ukraine. This includes the establishment of a call center (help-desk) and a direct email address to facilitate communication with the competent authorities. Additionally, detailed information in Greek, English, and Ukrainian regarding the process of entering Greece, the provision of temporary protection, material benefits, and hosting conditions is available on a special link on the MMA website. Beneficiaries of temporary protection can also submit online applications for housing.

Short-term accommodation for displaced Ukrainians is provided in the open structure of Sintiki in Serres for those who wish to reside there until the process of issuing travel documents, if required, is completed. Two additional accommodation facilities (in Serres and Elefsina) have also been converted into reception and hospitality facilities for displaced Ukrainian citizens who intend to stay for a longer period of time.

Moreover, the MMA has launched a new electronic platform called "I want to offer help," which is operational on its website. This platform provides a space for international organizations, NGOs, local authorities, and other interested parties to offer support and humanitarian aid.

**2. Reception and Identification**

One of the main priorities of Greek migration and asylum policy has been to create safe and decent reception conditions for asylum seekers, which includes providing housing and food, while also addressing the needs of local communities and working towards decongesting the Reception and Identification Centres (RICs) on the islands.

Currently, Greece has 33 accommodation facilities, including 7 Reception and Identification Centres located in various parts of the country. Three (3) of these facilities, situated on the islands of Samos, Kos, and Leros, have been transformed into Multi-Purpose Reception & Identification Centres.

The RICs have been established under the responsibility of the Reception and Identification Service of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum (MMA). Their primary objectives are to quickly identify, register, and process incoming migrants, introduce asylum seekers to asylum procedures, implement relocation schemes, and provide decent living conditions to asylum seekers in collaboration with relevant European Union agencies.

The new Multi-Purpose RICs have increased accommodation capacity and include designated safe zones for minors, as well as areas for leisure, social activities, and medical care. They also have dedicated spaces for registration and asylum procedures. The RICs are well-connected to nearby towns through public transportation, and all applicants residing in the facilities receive adequate cash assistance. Several good practices have been implemented in these centers. For instance, in the facility on the island of Chios, all applicants have access to information in their preferred language, as a dedicated room for information sessions has been established. "Focus group" discussions are facilitated by a communication officer, and large information billboards are available. The Reception and Identification Service, the Asylum Service of the MMA, and UNHCR are jointly running an information point. These good practices will be introduced to other facilities as well. Additionally, the Reception and Identification Service is collaborating with NGOs to implement a new interpretation program, which will enhance their ability to provide information on asylum procedures in accessible languages. Legal information and legal aid are accessible to all asylum applicants in these facilities.

Furthermore, community-based initiatives have proven beneficial in improving living conditions in the facilities and promoting sustainable engagement with local communities. These initiatives are implemented in collaboration with NGOs such as the "Movement on the Ground" on the islands of Chios and Lesvos, as well as international organizations like IOM.

**3. Integration of migrants and refugees**

The main integration program in Greece is the "HELIOS" Program (Hellenic Integration Support for Beneficiaries of International Protection), which is funded by the Ministry of Migration and Asylum (MMA) and implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and its partners. The program aims to support the transition of beneficiaries of international and temporary protection from the reception stage to the integration process. It provides various forms of support, including housing subsidies for up to 12 months, integration courses, facilitation of access to the labor market, raising awareness in local communities, and promoting social cohesion. As of April 2023, there were 44,174 registered beneficiaries of the program.

The Social Integration Directorate of the MMA, in collaboration with local authorities (municipalities), migrant and refugee organizations, and communities, is responsible for coordinating and providing support for the operation of Migrant Integration Centers (MICs) and Migrant and Refugee Integration Councils (MRICs):

There are currently 11 MICs in Greece, which offer information, advisory support, and networking opportunities related to integration issues. They help beneficiaries connect with relevant services and agencies and implement social integration activities that promote social cohesion.

MRICs serve as advisory bodies on migration and refugee issues, supporting the integration of third-country citizens in local communities and facilitating civil participation. A dedicated web service, called the "Help-Desk for Social Integration," has been created on the MMA website to promptly address questions and queries from beneficiaries of international protection regarding integration issues such as job counseling, housing, and financial assistance.

**4. Housing**

The HELIOS integration program provides beneficiaries with access to individual housing through networking with apartment owners and subsidies for rental and relocation costs. This includes a monthly rent subsidy for up to 12 months and a one-time contribution to installation costs. Supported Living Residences for Beneficiaries of International Protection are also available for individuals with disabilities who lack family support networks and require special protection. The Social Integration Directorate of the MMA proposed the creation of Supported Living Residences, hosting both Greek citizens and refugees, with a capacity of 2-4 people in 7 Regions of the country and 8-9 people in 3 Regions, as a way to also promote integration.

**5. Health and education**

According to Law 4368/2016, the provision of healthcare and nursing services is ensured for all uninsured persons and vulnerable social groups. In addition, the Greek Ministry of Health, through programs funded by ISF and AMIF of the European Union and implemented by the National Public Health Organization (EODY), provide holistic services that cover the health and psychosocial needs of refugees and migrants both in the mainland and in the islands of Northeast Aegean (Programmes PHILOS - Emergency Medical Treatment Facility for Refugees Crisis). Furthermore, to ensure that all migrants have access to vaccination against COVID-19, it was foreseen that anyone, regardless of residence status, can apply for a temporary social security number, as well as the possibility for migrants and refugees to receive a digital vaccination certificate.

National legislation safeguards human rights of all migrants, as well as access to basic services, with a special emphasis on the needs of children in the migration process. The Immigration and Social Integration Code stipulates that third country citizens who are minors and are residing in Greece are subject to the same requirement of compulsory education as Greek citizens and have unlimited and free access to the activities of school or academic communities. Accordingly, migrants’ children may be enrolled to public schools irrespective of their parents’ or guardians’ resident status (i.e. even without required documentation), whereas children’s enrollment to schools must always be facilitated. The MMA and the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the realization of the “All children in Education initiative for refugee and migrant children in Greece 2021-2024”, aiming to facilitate smooth access to school and the continuous attendance of refugee and migrant children.

**6. Protection of Unaccompanied Minors (UAMs)**

The Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors has, since 2020, prioritized the abolition of protective custody of unaccompanied minors in police departments. All unaccompanied minors were transferred to long-term accommodation facilities. At the same time, the Special Secretariat worked together with UNHCR for the establishment of a protective mechanism for tracing, registration and emergency accommodation as an alternative care model for homeless UAMs. As a result, the National Emergency Response Mechanism (NERM) was established (Law 4960/2022) and it includes a telephone line supported by interpreters and qualified professionals who provide guidance to public Authorities and Services, agencies, citizens or to the child him- or herself too. It also coordinates the process of integrating minors living in precarious conditions into emergency accommodation facilities. This is the first time that an alternative approach to protective custody has been implemented.

A significant innovation introduced by Law 4960/2022 was the adoption of a National Guardianship System for UAMs. The state, through the Special Secretariat, plays a coordinating, guiding, and supervising role in this system. Prosecutorial authorities ensure impartial institutional guarantee for appointing guardians, who can be public or private legal entities or international organizations. Guardianship services include representation in matters of personal status, provision of care, and assistance in property matters. The legislation also establishes the framework for accommodation facilities for UAMs, the development of the National Registry for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors, and the safe transfers and accompaniment of UAMs.

The capacity for long-term accommodation for UAMs has increased significantly, with 2,275 places available in 69 accommodation centers and 78 supervised apartments for semi-independent living for UAMs over 16 years old. Additionally, 240 places of emergency accommodation for children in immediate need of shelter and protection have been created.

Regarding UAMs coming of age, the new Migration Code (Law 5038/2023, effective from January 1, 2024) guarantees the right to provide adult third-country citizens or stateless persons who entered Greece as UAMs and have completed at least three years of secondary education in Greece before turning 23 years old with a ten-year residence permit. Another significant project for UAMs reaching adulthood and residing in UAM accommodation centers is the "Mentorship" program. Former UAMs who are now adults, as well as young adults, act as role models to help navigate UAMs towards integration in local communities, pursuing studies, vocational training, and employability.

To address mental health issues among unaccompanied children, the "Promoting mental health and preventing mental disorders in unaccompanied minors in Greece: UAM Mental Health Hub" project is being implemented. This program aims to develop skills, provide adequate training, and raise awareness among professionals working in accommodation facilities for UAMs to promote mental health and prevent mental disorders.

Furthermore, the Voluntary Relocation Program exemplifies solidarity and burden-sharing among European countries. Since April 2020, with support from the European Commission and the cooperation of EU member states and other third countries, the Greek government has implemented the Voluntary Relocation Program for UAMs in Greece. The program has relocated a total of 1,368 UAMs to 13 European states, with the program being completed by the end of March 2023.

**7. Protection of fundamental rights – The Fundamental Rights Officer (FRO)**

The Fundamental Rights Officer (FRO) was established in the Ministry of Migration and Asylum (MMA) in July 2022. The FRO, who was appointed in December 2022, has the responsibility of collecting and preliminarily evaluating complaints regarding alleged violations of fundamental rights during reception and asylum procedures. The FRO then transmits these complaints to the National Transparency Authority or other competent authorities for further investigation.

The Special Committee for Compliance with Fundamental Rights was established in order to monitor the procedures and implementation of national, EU and international legislation in the areas of border protection and granting of International Protection. The Committee consists of seven (7) members, including: the Fundamental Rights Protection Officer, high level representatives of the MMA, of the Ministry of Citizen Protection and the Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Insular Policy, the Governor or a member of the National Transparency Authority, the President or a member of the National Commission for Human Rights and the Ombudsman or the Assistant Ombudsman.

**8. Cooperation of Greek Authorities with NGOs in the field of migration and asylum**

International organizations, as well as NGOs, are valuable partners working together with competent Greek authorities to carry out a complex and demanding humanitarian duty. The role of NGOs in assisting in the overall management of the mass influx of migrants and asylum seekers in Greece throughout the years, particularly during the 2015-2016 migration and refugee crisis, has been highlighted on various occasions. The Greek authorities have acknowledged this longstanding, valuable, and mutually beneficial cooperation with NGOs, recognizing their expertise and added value.

NGOs continue to cooperate with the competent Greek authorities, including local government authorities, in undertaking numerous actions in the field of migration. They serve immediate and specific needs, contributing to the search for sustainable solutions for migrants and refugees. This cooperation encompasses several areas, such as the provision of appropriate interpretation services, the protection of unaccompanied minors, the housing of asylum seekers, and housing assistance for beneficiaries of international protection. NGOs also work on the integration of migrants and refugees in collaboration with local communities and migrant associations.